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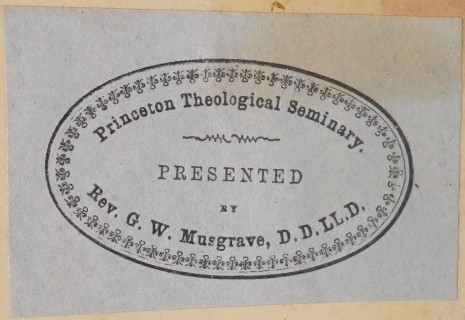

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Wardlaw, Ralph, 1779-1853.
Man responsible for his
belief: Two sermons,

Man Responsible for his Belief;

TWO SERMONS,

OCCASIONED BY A PASSAGE

IN THE

INAUGURAL DISCOURSE

OF

HENRY BROUGHAM, Esq., M. P.

ON HIS INSTALLATION AS LORD RECTOR OF THE UNIVERSITY OF GLASGOW, APRIL 6, 1825.

By RALPH WARDLAW, D. D.

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G. W. Musgrave

TO THE

Rev. STEVENSON MACGILL, D.D.

Regius Professor of Theology in the University of Glasgow.

Rev. and dear Sir,

The determination to commit these Discourses to the press was followed, almost instantly, with the thought and the resolution of inscribing them to you.—The circumstances which led to their delivery gave them a kind of relation to my Alma Mater, whilst their subject naturally associated them with the Chair which you so honourably and so usefully fill:—and the appropriateness which these considerations imparted to my purpose was gratifying to the feelings of personal friendship, because of the opportunity which was thus afforded me of giving public expression to that cordial esteem which I have long privately cherished.

Were I addressing myself to another, I could expatiate with pleasure on those features of character, in the observation of which that esteem originated, and of which the increasing developement has given it a progressive intenseness. But I am sensible there would be an equal violation of good taste and of correct feeling, were I to obtrude these upon the notice of your own mind, and court modesty to self-admiration.

That by the grace of God (which we ought to honour in honouring its effects) you may maintain unblemished the character which it has enabled you to acquire;—and that your life may be long spared, and your labours abundantly blessed, in cultivating the minds and hearts of candidates for the most important and sacred of all functions, is the sincere and fervent prayer of,

Rev. and Dear Sir,

Yours, with affectionate regard,

RALPH WARDLAW.

Glasgow, *Sept.* 19, 1825.

PREFACE.

THE following Sermons (to use the good old-fashioned title of pulpit addresses) were delivered on the first Lord's Day evenings of the two months immediately following the publication of Mr. Brougham's Inaugural Discourse; these monthly occasions having been preferred, as affording, for a subject to which this circumstance had drawn the public attention, a more numerous and more promiscuous auditory than the ordinary meetings of every Sabbath.

In prefaces to such Discourses, it is common for authors to assure their readers, that they were delivered without any view to their subsequent publication:—and for this assurance, they sometimes obtain *less* credit than it is entitled to, and possibly sometimes *more*. In the present instance, were an *affidavit* to this effect worth making at all, it might be made in *bona fide* sin-

cerity; and with equal truth it might be added, that my assent to the repeated request to publish was given with considerable hesitation.—Amongst other reasons for this, one, and not the least, was, a dread of the imputation of vanity, in presenting myself before the public as an antagonist to a man of such distinguished eminence. My imagination has fancied what might be said; and I have sensitively shrunk from the fancy, and almost resolved upon suppression. It is possible, I am aware, that this sensitiveness may itself be one form of the very principle of which it dreads the surmise. It may be allied to that description of modesty which Cowper represents as lurking

> "Conceal'd within an unsuspected part,
> The vainest corner of our own vain heart."

—Should any of my readers be *charitably* disposed to trace it to this lurking-place, I shall only say, that I *hope* they are mistaken.

The subject of these Discourses pertains to a department of knowledge, in which, perhaps, without a breach of charity, it may be feared, the mind of Mr. Brougham, with all the energy, and riches, and versatility of its highly cultivated powers, (of which his Inaugural Address is itself

so fine a specimen) has been more a stranger than in most others ; and if his decisions in this department be hasty and erroneous, the very celebrity which he has attained, and the extent of influence thence arising, only render the necessity the more urgent, and the duty the more imperative, of attempting their exposure. The subject itself is one on which correct conceptions are of the very highest moment,—connected as it is with incomparably the most interesting of all the prospects that lye before us ;—the account, namely, which we have every one of us to render to our Supreme Ruler and righteous Judge. The position which I have undertaken to question has been advanced with all publicity ; it has been, in a manner, assumed as a fundamental axiom, and no ordinary stress has been laid upon it ; and the application of it has been carried out to a very bold and startling length. —By such considerations, connected with the fact that no one else, so far as I know, has intimated any intention of taking up, at least from the press, the defence of what I cannot but deem important truth,—I have been induced to lay my sentiments before the public. If any, agreeing with me in the substance of these sentiments,

shall yet be disposed to say—"Non tali auxilio"—I must console myself with the consciousness of having "done what I could."

In mentioning the publicity with which the position here combated has been advanced, and the extreme length to which the application of it has been carried, I do not refer merely to the time when the Inaugural Discourse was delivered, but to a subsequent occasion, in a still higher quarter. The following is an extract of Mr. Brougham's speech in the House of Commons, on presenting a petition from Mr. Richard Carlile, as reported in the Morning Chronicle newspaper of July 1, with the comments of the Editor:—

"It was no offence against the Law to entertain any "set of opinions, either upon religious or political sub-"jects; neither was it any to discuss them, provided they "were discussed with decency and propriety. If a man "was an Atheist or an Infidel, it was his misfortune, not "his fault; but if he indecently and improperly published "those opinions, then he was amenable to the laws of his "country. He should look upon an Atheist or an Infidel, "if there were any such, with pity, not with blame; and "he should consider him to be a rash man who would un-"dertake to punish the free discussion of such subjects, pro-"vided that discussion was conducted with decency, as he "considered that such discussion, instead of being injuri-"ous, would be beneficial to religion."

"Mr. Brougham did himself great honour," says the Editor, "by the eloquent and manly manner in which, on "presenting a petition from Richard Carlile, he reprobat-"ed the sentence under which that individual had so long "suffered.

"His arguments were a very apposite commentary on "the beautiful passage in his Inaugural Discourse, at "Glasgow, printed at the request of the Principal, Profes-"sors, and Students, of that University, and therefore "adopted by that learned and highly respectable body:—'The "great truth has finally gone forth to all the ends of the "earth, That man shall no more render account to man for "his belief, over which he himself has no control. Hence-"forward nothing shall prevail upon us to praise or to "blame any one for that which he can no more change "than he can the hue of his skin, or the height of his sta-"ture.' It is the more meritorious in Mr. Brougham, and "the University of Glasgow, to adopt so liberal a principle, "that the nation in general, is, we believe far from being "ripe for it."

What the Editor of the Morning Chronicle here says about the sentiment in question having been adopted and sanctioned by the "learned and highly respectable body" of the University of Glasgow, is exceedingly foolish, and undeserving of any serious comment: nor is it for me to say, how far the eulogium bestowed upon that body on such a ground would be received with complacency by its members.—What I wish the reader to mark, is, the length to which the ap-

plication of the said sentiment is carried,—and carried with this Editor's unmeasured applause. I am a decided friend to that freedom of discussion for which Mr. Brougham contends, and am as fearless as he can be about its ultimate results to the cause of truth. I am a decided friend too to liberality of sentiment, and to charitable judgment of character. But that infidelity,—and not infidelity only, but even atheism itself, is to be regarded by us as a man's *misfortune* and *not his fault*, is, in my mind, a licentious extension of charity beyond all scriptural and all reasonable bounds. That an atheist is to be *pitied*, I grant. There is not, amongst all on earth that can claim compassion, a more truly pitiable being. O the dreary wretchedness of that soul, if such a soul there be, that has quenched to itself the light of creation, and divested the universe of a presiding and pervading Deity! But amongst the grounds of my pity, I must be permitted to include the state of the man's *heart*, as well as of his *understanding*. A blameless atheist—an atheist that has arrived at his miserable conclusions without the perverting influence of *moral pravity*, under one or more of its various modifications,—is a character, I honestly confess, of which I am

unable to form the conception. To define, with unexceptionable precision, the boundaries of charity, is a task, for the delicacy and difficulty of which I pretend not to be competent. But boundaries it surely has. And I cannot think that I am chargeable with unwarrantably circumscribing these, when I refuse the claim of unbiassed candour of judgment, or of unimpeachable soundness of moral principle, to the man who DENIES A GOD!—In the Discourses it is my endeavour to show, that in the scriptures the claim I have just mentioned is refused to *all infidelity* of their peculiar discoveries, and to illustrate the principles, on which, as I conceive, this refusal may be justly vindicated. I hope I shall not be found, on a subject as delicate as it is momentous, to have "spoken wickedly for God," or to have "darkened counsel by words without knowledge."

R. W.

DISCOURSE I.

JOHN III. 18, 19.

"*He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not, is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.*"

I KNOW not why I should conceal, what has led me to the choice of the subject which I have just announced.—When names of distinguished eminence are found giving their public sanction to sentiments, of which the truth is more than doubtful, and yet the falsity plausible;—sentiments which, wherever they are admitted without their neces-

sary qualifications, tend to consequences injurious to the best interests of mankind; and when these sentiments, moreover, are arrayed in the charms of a captivating eloquence, and are presented with the tone of confident triumph, with the emphasis and solemnity of oracular wisdom, and, what is still more imposing, with the zealous warmth of real though mistaken philanthropy:—it cannot surely be deemed by any a departure from the proper province of a teacher and guardian of divine truth, to bear his testimony, with equal publicity, against them, and to lift the voice, however comparatively feeble, of honest and faithful warning.

It is but a few weeks, since the following sentences, with every accompaniment that could contribute to recommend the leading sentiment which they contain to inconsiderate applause, and to too unqualified adoption, were delivered, in presence of a number of our fellow-citizens, to the senate and youth of our university:—"As men will no longer "suffer themselves to be led blindfold in

" ignorance, so will they no more yield to " the vile principle of judging and treating " their fellow-creatures, not according to the " intrinsic merit of their actions, but accord- " ing to the incidental and involuntary co- " incidence of their opinions. The great " truth has finally gone forth to all the ends " of the earth, THAT MAN SHALL NO MORE " RENDER ACCOUNT TO MAN FOR HIS BELIEF, " OVER WHICH HE HAS HIMSELF NO CON- " TROL. Henceforward, nothing shall pre- " vail upon us to praise or to blame any one " for that which he can no more change " than he can the hue of his skin, or the " height of his stature."*

To these sentences a still greater publicity and permanence have since been given by the press; and their leading position, emblazoned in capitals, is held forth to the grateful and admiring acceptance of the whole world.—That they contain *no truth*, it would be uncandid and scandalous to

* Inaug. Disc. p. 47.

affirm. They *do* contain truth; and truth too of the highest practical utility.—It is a truth, that men *ought* no longer to be led, and it would be a joyful truth, if a truth it were, that they *are resolved* no longer to be led, blindfold in ignorance.—It is a truth, that the principle which leads men to judge and treat each other, not according to the intrinsic merit of their actions, but according to the accidental and involuntary coincidence of their opinions, *is* a vile principle;—although room might obviously enough be found here for certain questions of casuistry, about what it is that constitutes the intrinsic merit of actions; whether the said merit lies in the *actions themselves*, or in the *principles*, in the mind of the agent, from which they proceed: —for in the latter case, the spirit of the sentiment, however true, might not be so easily reducible to practice.—It is a truth, that man should not render account to man for his belief:—and, in as far as this is meant to express the grand principle of *universal toleration*, there is no length to which I

would not cheerfully go along with its eloquent and powerful advocate: the very word *toleration*, (seeing a right to tolerate supposes the existence of a corresponding right to restrain and to coerce) being a term, which, in such an application of it, no language ought to retain. Men should be as free to think, as they are free to breathe. I make no exceptions. Let truth defend herself; and defend herself by her own legitimate means. She is well able to do so; nor does she stand in need of any auxiliary methods, beyond those of fair argument, and rational persuasion. Give her an open field, and the free use of her weapons, and she will stand her ground. Legal restraint and suppression have invariably had the effect of giving tenfold prevalence to the dreaded error; and measures of coercion, whilst they have made hypocrites by thousands, have never made, and never can make, one genuine convert to her cause.

Most heartily also do we concur with the eloquent orator in the full spirit of what he represents as the practical use of his princi-

ple, in regulating the reciprocal conduct of men, in the intercourse of social life:—"Henceforward, treating with entire respect "those who conscientiously differ from our- "selves, the only practical effect of the dif- "ference will be, to make us enlighten the "ignorance, on one side or the other, from "which it springs,—by instructing *them*, if "it be theirs,—*ourselves*, if it be our own; "to the end, that the only kind of unanimity "may be produced, which is desirable among "rational beings,—the agreement proceed- "ing from full conviction after the freest "discussion."*

But there is what I conceive to be an error of no trivial magnitude, *lurking* (shall I say?) amidst these salutary truths. No: it does not lurk. Whether an error or not, it is not concealed. It is palpable, avowed, prominent: and the very accompaniments of truth, with which it is attended, serve to render it the more insinuating and danger-

* Inaug. Disc. p. 48.

ous. As persecution for conscience' sake is the subject of the entire passage in which the offensive sentences stand, we are warranted in conceiving that it is to *religious* opinions and belief that the speaker more especially, perhaps I might say exclusively, refers. Now the matter, as it appears to me, stands thus. If it be indeed true, as is here, without qualification, assumed and asserted, that "coincidences and diversities of opinion are altogether accidental and involuntary," —that "over his belief a man has no control," any more than he has over "the hue of his skin, or the height of his stature,"—and that *for* his belief, whatever it may be, a man is no more the proper subject of praise or of blame, than he is for a light or a dark complexion, or for the dimensions of his corporeal frame:—if, I say, these things be so, then it follows,—not merely that man should not account TO MAN for his belief,—but also, and with equal certainty, that man has no account to render for his belief TO GOD. There is no moral responsibility connected

with it. We never think of associating any such responsibility with colour, or with stature; and if the two cases be really parallel, neither should we, in any circumstances, associate it with opinions or belief.

Now it is precisely here, that we conceive the mischievous error to lye. We dare not hesitate to say, that between this sentiment and the most explicit statements and uniform assumptions of the Bible, there is a perfect contrariety. Our orator and the inspired penmen are quite at issue. It is impossible for any one to receive the doctrine now promulgated by the former, as the "great truth that has" at length happily, "gone forth to all the ends of the earth," without renouncing the authority of the latter, whose commission was to proclaim "to all the ends of the earth" a message of a far different tenor. When the apostles announced their testimony, in the name of the God of truth, they knew nothing of that philosophy which would now release men from the obligation to give it a believing re-

ception, and exculpate them from all guilt in the refusal of it. When they "went into all the world, and preached the gospel to every creature," they subjoined the authoritative assurance, "He that believeth shall be saved, and he that believeth not shall be condemned." According to *their* declarations, the difference between faith and unbelief was of no trivial import. It was all the difference between safety and destruction, between the blessing and the curse of God, between heaven and hell. We do not find them saying to their hearers,—"We are aware that you have no control over your belief; that it is a thing altogether involuntary; that your believing or not believing what we testify can therefore have no influence whatsoever upon your prospects of retribution as accountable creatures,—for it is as unconnected with your will, as is the hue of your skin or the height of your stature. We *recommend* our testimony to you, knowing it to be from God, and persuaded of its beneficial tendency:—but, if the evidence we

set before you of its truth does not produce conviction in your minds, we are far from meaning to insinuate that on this account it will fare at all the worse with you in the end." —They proceeded, as you all know, on no such principles;—but, in direct and unqualified terms, connected *salvation* with the *acceptance* of their message, and *perdition* with its *refusal.*

That this was the simple matter of fact, I may show a little more fully from the inspired record by and by.—But before proceeding further with the scripture argument, I may be allowed to observe, that the principle so unqualifiedly laid down is as inconsistent with the true philosophy of the human mind, and with the numberless and obvious facts of every-day experience, as it is with the dictates and implications of holy writ.—Is there, I would ask, no reciprocally influential connection between the understanding and the affections? and more especially, has the state of the latter no influence upon the exercise of the former? Who that

knows any thing of even the most ordinary phenomena of human nature,—phenomena which, so far from being recondite, are open to every one's observation,—is not aware how mighty is the power of the desires and inclinations over the operations of intellect? —to what a vast extent, both in the number of instances and in the degree of force, opinion and belief are affected by predisposition,—by the previous bent of the will? The thing is notorious—proverbially notorious;—the blindness produced by the want of will to see, being pronounced by proverb, which embodies the authority of experience, the most inveterate and hopeless of all.—I speak, of course, of human nature, according to the appearances which it *now* presents. The question is not, whether what I now describe be a regular and healthy, or a disordered and morbid exercise of its powers and functions,—but simply, whether the fact be or be not as I have stated it:—not what was originally the case,—or even, whether the case ever was otherwise,—but what is ac-

tually the case *now?* And as to this, it is impossible to hesitate.

I do not, for my own part, entertain a doubt, but that at the very moment when the sentiment under consideration was publicly uttered, there was a practical exemplification furnished of the truth of the observation just made concerning it,—an experimental refutation of its principle.—At the time of its being delivered, it was generally and loudly applauded. There might possibly be not a few, especially of the junior part of the auditory, who swelled the noisy acclamation, as they are ever ready to do, without well knowing why:—there might be some, too, who gave it their instant and hearty sanction, because of the decided reprobation which it involved of all religious intolerance, without, at the moment of excited enthusiasm, adverting to its other bearings. But the question I would now ask, is, Was there, in the mind of no one present, an existing predisposition to receive it? Were there none, with whom it was likely

beforehand to prove a favourite sentiment, —a sentiment which they would be eager to catch at, and fond to retain? Was there no thoughtless man of the world there,—was there no inconsiderate sceptic there,—who felt inwardly pleased with the sentiment, as one on which his mind could repose, in an easy and self-complacent quietude? Were there none, in a word, (whatsoever might be the inward spring from which the feeling arose) who were gratified with the idea, that they might think and believe even as it chanced to them, without being responsible, —without incurring, for their opinions or their faith, any charge of moral delinquency, more than for the stature or the complexion which nature or circumstances might happen to have given them?—If in a single bosom present there existed such a predisposition, —a readiness to catch at what was uttered, and to be easily persuaded of its truth,—a wish, however secret, that it might be as the speaker represented it:—then there was in that bosom a refutation of the sentiment;—

for there was one instance at least (and if one, there might be many) of the understanding being influenced by the heart,—of the opinions and belief being modified by the inclinations.

Who, indeed, is there, who has not had the experience, how comparatively easy a task it is to convince a man by argument, when inclination has been first gained over;—and how hard and hopeless the attempt to satisfy him, when the will is in opposition?—how light the assault required to storm the citadel of the understanding, when the affections and desires have once capitulated; and how desperate the resistance, how determined and pertinacious the holding-out, when the heart is hostile to the offered proposals, or to the grounds, however just and unexceptionable, on which they are presented?—"Why do ye not understand my speech?" said Jesus to the Jews—"even because ye cannot hear" (that is, ye cannot *bear*) "my words."—No where, indeed, are illustrations to be found of the truth of the remarks I

am now making, more striking and more humbling, than in our Saviour's intercourse with his unbelieving countrymen, during his public ministry. That he was the Christ, was attested by proofs without number, of which every one was by itself conclusive. But all their deeply rooted prejudices, all their fondly cherished expectations, all their eager wishes and desires, (the wishes and desires of an unrenewed and worldly spirit) were against the admission of this truth. The consequence was, that to the force of evidence, though clear as the light of the meridian sun, they continued obstinately blind. Every additional proof served only to rouse up their enmity, and inflame their rage; producing and maintaining that state of mind, a more intolerable than which it is not easy to imagine, where there is war between the heart and the judgment;—where there is hatred of the truth in the former, and a powerful witness to it in the latter, and a consequent agonizing conflict between aversion on the one part, and secret, unac-

knowledged, resisted conviction on the other; —where, in a word, the man is "divided against himself."—Evidence, in these circumstances, cannot be endured. Every attempt is made to refute and to discredit it; and when such attempts fail, violence, both of words and conduct, is brought to the aid of deficient and baffled argument.—The account of the blind man, in the ninth chapter of the gospel by John, presents a highly interesting and instructive exemplification of this unhappy state of mind. The Pharisees first of all do what they can to disparage the character of Jesus, and to fix upon it, in the public mind, the stigma of impiety:—their next endeavours are, to discredit and disprove the miracle,—an increasing irritability evincing itself as the examination of the case proceeds, and as it gradually opens in a manner so contrary to their wishes:—till at length, being fully confronted by the poor beggar himself, with all the simplicity and force of truth, opposed to the inconsistency and chicanery of error; they feel their ground

untenable; they can stand it no longer; they cease to argue, though they do not yield to conviction; defeated in argument, they have recourse to power; they assume the portly attitude of incensed superiority; they revile, and scold, and thunder the anathemas of excommunication against their innocent and helpless victim.

Now, we must lay it down as a position which will not admit of controversy, that in as far as *opinions* are thus influenced by *disposition*,—*belief*, by *inclination*,—the *decisions of the understanding* by the *state of the heart*,—they are fair and legitimate subjects of *moral responsibility*.—There may, in this view of the matter, be no absurdity in affirming, that moral evil may attach to an opinion,—virtue or vice, to belief or unbelief,—and a just imputation of sin to an intellectual decision. I hesitate not to say, that even in the ordinary every-day concerns of life, this influence of the heart upon the understanding, of inclination upon opinion and belief, has place, though in greater and less degrees,

in an immense preponderance of instances; in not a few of them, I readily grant, in consequence of our natural unwillingness to believe it, (another modification of the very same tendency) with hardly any perception or consciousness of it on the part of him by whom it is exemplified.—And on the subject of *religion*, to which alone our present inquiry relates, the authority of scripture unites with observation and experience in convincing me, that there is no exception; that the moral influence of which I speak is universal; none being exempt from it, although the degrees may be various of its natural and acquired force. I dare not qualify this statement. Believing the divine testimony,—the testimony of unerring omniscience, which, to every unprejudiced observer, must appear in full accordance with facts,—respecting the natural ungodliness of the human heart,—its tendencies to forget the Most High, to "depart from the fountain of living water, and to hew out for itself broken cisterns that can hold no water,"—

its love of sin and aversion to holiness,—its froward self-will and impatience of the restraints of authority,—its fondness for all that gratifies its pride, and its disrelish of all that is humbling;—believing this verdict on the character of human nature, I cannot but hold the conviction, that in the bosom of every son and daughter of Adam there exists a predisposition against the gospel,—against the truth of God, and the God of truth,—against the Lord, and against his Christ.

By some, I am aware, the eloquent propounder of the sentiment under discussion, is conceived to have meant no more by it, than the trite and common maxim, that *every man's faith depends upon his country and his parentage*,—that *every person will be what he is taught and trained to be*,— a *Mahometan*, a *Pagan*, or a *Christian;* and that, this being the case, *no man can be accountable for the place of his birth, or the circumstances of his education.*—I can hardly imagine, that *such* a man would announce an opinion so old and so ordinary, with so much

of the pomp of recent discovery, and the emphasis of pre-eminent importance. But let me suppose this his meaning:—I would answer, without entering at large into the various questions connected with the opinion—

In the first place, Granting its general truth, (and it would be foolish to dispute it,) it surely cannot be considered as in the least degree invalidating the obligation to examine the evidences of what is presented to us as a communication from Deity,—to weigh the grounds of its claim to our acceptance. This obligation lies imperatively on all, without exception, to whom such a record comes. And then the simple question, connected with our *present* subject, comes to be, precisely what has been already stated—whether there be, or be not, in the state and character of the human heart in general, or of the heart of the individual in particular, any thing that *predisposes* either *for* or *against* it, and that thus goes to bias the mind in the

examination of its evidence, and in the denial or acknowledgment of its truth.

Secondly: The manner in which the opinion is stated,—so exceedingly vague and undefined in the meaning of its terms,—only serves to discover the sadly inadequate and erroneous conceptions, so extensively prevalent, of *what it is to be a christian*;—conceptions, which form not the least of the unavoidable and pernicious effects of the *nationalizing* of christianity,—by which the designation *christian*, from having been a definite term of spiritual character, distinguishing the few from the many, has degenerated into a mere line of geographical partition; or a shade of colouring, by which, in a map, one region of the globe is marked off from another.—It is perfectly true, that men *may* be, —that they are *most likely* to be,—or, put it as strongly as you please, that they *certainly will* be, christians in *this* sense, according to their country or their parentage, in the same manner as they would be Hindoos or Mussulmen. But that every one who is born of

christian parents, and taught christian truth, will be a christian in the true scriptural acceptation of the name, is a far different proposition,—a proposition as certainly false, as the other is true. Every truly christian parent feels and laments the difficulty, of instilling the truths of God so as to procure for them a cordial acceptance,—and to bring the affections, passions, and desires under the regimen of the principles of spiritual and vital christianity. The whole process of really christian education develops to such parents the strength of the hostile predisposition, and impresses the necessity of an influence superior to parental for effectually overcoming it.

By others, the sentiment of which I have ventured thus to express my disapproval, has been understood as amounting to no more than the metaphysical axiom, that *belief must necessarily correspond with the perception of evidence, it being in the nature of the thing impossible that the mind should believe, or disbelieve, otherwise than as evidence is,*

or is not, discerned.—Now I am far from intending to question the truth of this axiom. It is quite entitled to the designation, being a self-evident and indisputable truth. But this admission does not, in the smallest degree, affect our conclusion as to moral responsibility; for one very obvious reason,—that it is precisely on this point, the perception of evidence, that the predisposing causes referred to are apt most powerfully to operate. That in the examination of any question, the perceptions of the mind are affected by the previous state of the inclinations, both in the discernment of the bearings of proof, and in appreciating the value of its different items, is, as I have before observed, true even to a proverb. It is so certain, so universally understood and admitted, that writers on the constitution of the mind, and on moral evidence, insist on the necessity and importance of guarding against such sources of biassing prepossession,—those IDOLS,—(to use the designation given them by Lord Bacon)—which entice the mind from an uncorrupted

homage to truth.—To use a familiar illustration:—how very often, when we hear a person say of a proposition that seems exceedingly plain—"I cannot see that,"—do we find that there is some consideration of *interest*, in one or other of its endless varieties, that prevents him. His mental vision is thus obscured, or distorted. There is a mote in his eye. He *cannot* see, simply because he is *unwilling* to see.

Before proceeding to the direct illustration of the text, in which a predisposition against the truth of God revealed in the gospel is so strongly and generally asserted, I wish to offer one additional observation.—I would not make the eminent person whose sentiment has been the subject of comment, responsible for more than lies justly to his charge. Now there is a class of persons who may be fond enough to lay hold of his principle, but who lay hold of it unfairly, and for whose conduct it can afford neither cover nor palliation. What his own practice may have been in regard to the Bible, I know not. For ought

I can tell, he may have examined its contents and its evidences,—or he may not. I have to do at present only with his words as they stand before me:—and here I find him declaring, "the only unanimity desirable "among rational creatures" to be "the "agreement proceeding from *full conviction* "*after the freest discussion.*"

The belief or the unbelief, then, which, according to that statement of his views by which our censures must be limited, is considered as exempt from moral imputation, is a belief or an unbelief *preceded by examination of evidence.*—Whatever, indeed, may be thought of belief or unbelief, in themselves, it can never be questioned, that there may be a contraction of guilt by the refusal or the neglect to attend to evidence. The degree of this guilt must be in proportion to the intrinsic magnitude of the subject,—the authority under which it presents itself,—and the importance of the consequences depending on the determination of the question at issue.—Now there is a host of un-

thinking sceptics,—of uninquiring infidels,—to whom the sentiment I have been combating, were it ever so true, can be of no avail. It affords them no shelter. It yields no apology, no palliation of their conduct. It supposes consideration; but they have not considered:—it assumes examination; but they have not examined. Whether belief be voluntary or involuntary, there can be nothing but what is wilful in the neglect or refusal to attend and to inquire. It admits of no excuse, no extenuation. Investigation is duty; and every thing concurs to aggravate the criminality of neglecting it. The *subjects* are of unutterable magnitude;—the *authority* is the highest that any doctrine can claim;—and the *consequences* are the most momentous that can possibly await the issue of any inquiry. On such a subject, not only is investigation imperiously demanded, but no light, partial, superficial inquiry will discharge the obligation. It must be earnest, persevering, full. No source of evidence that is accessible should be left unexplored.

A revelation from our God *must* be desirable,—supremely desirable. I will not reason with a fellow-creature that can question this. His intellect must be disordered; and disordered, there is reason more than to fear, by the power of a perverted conscience and a vitiated heart. And in proportion as such a revelation *is* desirable, should the importance be felt of our not being deceived,—of our neither being, on the one hand, the dupes of a witless credulity, nor the victims, on the other, of an incredulous obstinacy. O how inexpressible the folly and the impiety of the man, who has in his hand what professes to be a communication from the Sovereign and Judge of all, and who does not think it worth his while either to acquaint himself with its contents, or to inquire into its authority! Here surely, if anywhere, there is guilt without apology. The conduct that incurs it is neither *accidental*, nor *involuntary*, nor a matter over which there can be *no control*. It is, in all respects, wilful;

and therefore, on no just principle, capable of vindication.

The declaration in the second part of the 18th verse—"he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God"—is susceptible of two interpretations:—

1. Men are guilty as having transgressed the divine law. They lie under a sentence of condemnation; that law having the explicit sanction annexed to it,—"Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things written in the book of the law to do them." The declaration, therefore, in this part of the text, when taken by itself, might simply mean, that *in consequence* of their not believing in Christ, *the guilt of a violated law still stands to their account.* They remain under the sentence, and exposed to the penalty, as the unavoidable result of their neglecting or refusing the only means of deliverance. In this sense, unbelief is not the

ground of their condemnation,—but only the *occasion* of their *remaining condemned* on *another* ground.

2. It may express the sentiment, that *unbelief itself is a sin*, by which guilt is contracted, and condemnation incurred;—that "he that believeth not is condemned," not merely *in consequence* of his unbelief, but expressly *on account* of it.—That this latter is the principal meaning of the words, (although not of course to the exclusion of the other, which is inseparably connected with it) is evident from the terms of the 19th verse,—which is explanatory of the statement in the 18th, and a vindication of it from every imputation of severity or injustice:—"And THIS is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men have loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil."—In *these* words there is no room for diversity of explanation. Unbelief, or the rejection of the gospel, is most unequivocally and strongly affirmed to have its origin in the love of evil in the human heart,

in one or other of its many varieties. The whole verse may be considered as a commentary on the apostolic phrase,—"an *evil heart of unbelief*."

The "*deeds* being evil" is a phrase, which must not be restricted, in its application, to the openly wicked, to the notoriously and actively profligate. These are the characters, of whom people in general, when they hear such expressions, are apt to think. But the word "*deeds*" must here be understood inclusively of evil *desires* and *affections*, as well as of what are more properly denominated *works*—of every principle, in short, from which disrelish of divine truth may be conceived to arise. In confirmation of this, it may be observed, that Paul enumerates amongst "the *works* of the flesh," not only wicked actions, but such evil tempers as "hatred," "wrath," and "envy."*—It is obvious, indeed, that, as outward actions are only indications of inward principles, it is

* Gal. v. 19—21.

not to the actions, but to the principles, that we must trace the dislike of whatever interferes with their indulgence. It is the principles that constitute the character; the actions are only the manifestation of it to others.

The clear affirmation of the text, then, is, that all unbelief of the gospel has a *moral cause*, and that that cause is *evil*. The language is so unequivocal and decisive, that I might safely rest the scriptural authority of the sentiment on this passage alone. It may not be amiss, however, to adduce a few additional proofs, from the Bible, of unbelief being held and treated by its Divine Author as a sin,—as involving guilt, and incurring condemnation.

In the *first* place, I may refer, in evidence, to the *calls* and *invitations*, with which the scriptures abound, to receive the gospel as the testimony of God, and to accept its offered blessings.—Such calls and invitations, of which it is needless to quote examples, *must* come with authority. They *must* carry

with them an obligation to compliance. Coming from the God of heaven, they cannot be supposed to leave the sinner, who has heard and has refused them, in the very same state in which he previously had been, —with no additional charge in the account he has to render. It is altogether inconceivable, that God himself should invite to the acceptance of favours, which his creatures, to whom the offer is made, are at liberty innocently to decline.

But *secondly:* The Bible does not confine itself to calls and invitations:—the acceptance of the gospel testimony is matter of explicit *command:*—"This is his *commandment*, that we believe on the name of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord."*—Although, then, in one view, every call and invitation of God must contain in it the essence and force of a command; yet here is something still more express. The gospel is a *divine institute*, as much as any legal order or pre-

* 1 John iii. 23.

scription. It declares the *divine will* as to the way in which men are to be saved; and it has all the force of law. It is called, in contradistinction from the "law of works," the "law of faith." The former is that original constitution of things, according to which man, *as a creature*, held life on the ground of his own obedience, or works:—the latter is that new constitution, to which the violation of the former has given rise, and according to which man, *as a sinner*, is accepted through faith in the merits of another. Both are alike divine, and have the sanction of the same authority. The latter is as really the law of God in regard to *sinful* man, as the former was his law in regard to man *in innocence:* and the refusal of the testimony and offers of the gospel is as direct a trespass against the new constitution, as the eating of the forbidden fruit was a transgression of the old.—On what principle a *command to believe* proceeds, will afterwards be considered: the present point is, to show that there *is* such a command.

I may notice, *thirdly*, in close connection with the preceding particular, that *faith* is sometimes spoken of as *obedience*.—"They have not all *obeyed* the gospel; for Esaias saith, Lord, who hath *believed* our report?"—"A great company of the priests were *obedient* to the faith." The mystery of the gospel, revealed through the apostles, "is made known to all nations for the *obedience of faith*."*—I am aware that, in such passages, *obeying* includes more than believing. It includes a giving up of the heart to the influence of the truth believed,—yielding to its holy power and tendencies,—not thinking only, but feeling and acting, according to it: "God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin; but ye have *obeyed from the heart* that form of doctrine which was delivered you." But still, the "belief of the truth," yielding to the force of its evidence, and receiving it as from God, is without doubt the *first* thing expressed by such phraseology.

* Rom. x. 16. Acts vi. 7. Rom. xvi. 26.

God is *obeyed*, when his *testimony is believed;* and all by whom it is refused are ranked among the *dis*obedient.

This will be still more apparent, when we have noticed, *fourthly*, the explicit declarations of the *sinfulness of unbelief*, and the annexation to it of a *sentence of condemnation*.—The text itself, as I have before stated, is a most unequivocal instance of this. And the following are in harmony with it:—"When He (the Holy Spirit) is come, he will convince the world of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment:—of *sin, because they believe not on me*:"—"Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; *he that believeth not shall be condemned*:"—"He that believeth on the Son of God hath everlasting life; *he that believeth not the Son, shall not see life*, but the wrath of God abideth on him:"—"He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself; he that believeth not God, hath made him a liar" (no light or venial

guilt surely) "because he hath not believed the record that God gave of his Son:"—"The Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven, with his mighty angels, in flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that *obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ;* who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power; when he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in *all them that believe, (because our testimony among you was believed)* in that day."*

Such passages as these must mean something more than that *in consequence* of men's not believing, or availing themselves of the means of pardon, their sins, consisting of violations of the divine law, *remain unforgiven:* they clearly and strongly teach us, that unbelief itself is one of the sins *on account* of which perdition comes upon the unbeliever. The following powerful and striking

* John xvi. 8, 9. Mark xvi. 15, 16. John iii. 36. 1 John v. 10. 2 Thess. i. 7—10.

expostulation from the book of Proverbs may be added to the passages already cited. It is not less persuasive and touching from the earnestness of pity which it breathes, than it is instructive and profitable as a decisive intimation of truth:—"Wisdom crieth without; she uttereth her voice in the streets; she crieth in the chief place of concourse, in the openings of the gates: in the city she uttereth her words, saying, How long, ye simple ones, will ye love simplicity? and the scorners delight in their scorning, and fools hate knowledge? Turn ye at my reproof: behold, I will pour out my Spirit unto you, I will make known my words unto you. Because I have called, and ye refused; I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded; but ye have set at nought all my counsel, and would none of my reproof: I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear cometh; when your fear cometh as desolation, and your destruction cometh as a whirlwind; when distress and anguish cometh upon you. Then shall they

call upon me, but I will not answer; they shall seek me early, but they shall not find me: for that they hated knowledge, and did not choose the fear of the Lord: they would none of my counsel: they despised all my reproof: therefore shall they eat of the fruit of their own way, and be filled with their own devices. For the turning away of the simple shall slay them, and the prosperity of fools shall destroy them. But whoso hearkeneth unto me shall dwell safely, and shall be quiet from fear of evil."*

This passage expresses, as plainly as the text does, the *moral cause* of the refusal of sinners to listen to the voice of heavenly wisdom:—they "*love* their simplicity;" they "*delight* in their scorning;" they "*hate* knowledge;" they "*do not choose* the fear of the Lord." This is the same thing as "loving darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil."

Having thus shown you very briefly the

* Prov. i. 20—33.

light in which unbelief is placed in the scriptures;—having adduced evidence, to which, were it necessary, much more might be added, that, so far from being "held guiltless" as the hue of the skin or the height of the stature, it is condemned as sinful, and threatened with punitive retribution;—we now go on to consider the *grounds* on which it is so regarded, and to vindicate the righteousness of the divine procedure.

In entering on this part of my subject, I must begin by stating a distinction, which is sufficiently obvious, and yet too frequently lost sight of; that, namely, between the *sovereignty* and the *equity* of the Divine administration.—Sovereignty is simply "the good pleasure of God's will," by which he is left at full liberty to do towards his creatures whatever is not inconsistent with equity. Equity is exercised in giving every one his due; and what is due in equity cannot be withheld in sovereignty. In regard to all that is *good*, sovereignty may *go beyond* what is due, but cannot, without a violation of

the claims of equity, *keep within* it. As to the infliction of *evil*, it comes not at all within the province of sovereignty; it belongs exclusively to that of equity. The *sovereign infliction of evil* is an anomaly, that can have no place under the righteous government of God. Sovereignty has to do only with the *bestowment of good*. This is its proper department: and here its freedom is without restriction; its range of beneficence without limits. Equity can neither withhold deserved good, nor visit with undeserved evil: —sovereignty may both suspend deserved evil, and confer undeserved good. With regard to creatures, then, that have sinned and are guilty, there may be a sovereign determination to bless and to save: but there can be no sovereign determination to curse and to damn. The curse and damnation are the result, in every case, not of sovereignty, but of equity. There is a decree of salvation; and, from the nature of the thing, that decree *must* be sovereign. In nothing else than sovereignty, or Divine good plea-

sure, *can* it have its origin: for those for whose salvation it provides are such as, in equity, deserve to perish. But there is no sovereign decree of reprobation and perdition. The sole determination, on this side of the alternative, is the determination of equity to *punish sin*. Salvation is the result of a purpose of sovereignty; damnation is the fulfilment of a sentence of equity. The former presupposes unworthiness; the latter, desert. Merited salvation, and unmerited perdition, are ideas alike incongruous and contradictory.

On these principles, if unbelief infers guilt and condemnation, it *must* be regarded as, in the principle from which it arises, involving some description of *moral turpitude*. The sentence is not pronounced, nor the punishment inflicted, in arbitrary vindictiveness. "The righteous Lord, who loveth righteousness," must see ground in equity for both. There is nothing, we may be assured, more arbitrary in the punishment of unbelief of Divine truth, than in the pun-

ishment of any transgression of the Divine law. The one is as much a matter of equity as the other. If unbelief involved no moral delinquency, on no principle of justice could its punishment be vindicated.

I must now observe further, that there are *three things* which appear to be necessary to the guilt of unbelief:—these are, *capacity of understanding*, *opportunity of knowledge*, and *sufficiency of evidence*.—The absence of *any one* of these would nullify just responsibility.

When there is a natural incapacity of understanding, it is quite obvious that there can be no accountableness, no guilt. This is more than admitted, it is the sentiment distinctly expressed, in the language of our Lord to the pharisees, after the cure of the blind beggar recorded in the ninth chapter of the gospel according to John. "For judgment," said Jesus, "I am come into this world, that they who see not might see, and that they who see might be made blind. And some of the pharisees who were with

him heard these words, and said unto him, Are we blind also? Jesus said unto them, IF YE WERE BLIND, YE SHOULD HAVE NO SIN: but now ye say, We see; therefore your sin remaineth."—What these pharisees said of themselves, was in *two* respects, true. They possessed natural faculties of discernment, powers of mental vision, in many of them acute and vigorous:—and they had the scriptures of the Old Testament in their hands; they were not unacquainted with their contents; and, as far as capacity of understanding went, they were quite capable of discerning the correspondence between the types, and predictions, and promises, which they contained, and all that they saw and heard in Jesus of Nazareth. "Therefore their sin remained."—But to discuss the causes that prevented their discerning what their natural capacity fully qualified them to discover, would anticipate a subsequent part of our subject.*

* The particular thus briefly touched upon disposes of all cases of idiocy and natural intellectual incapacity.

The second thing mentioned as necessary to unbelief assuming a moral character, and becoming chargeable with guilt, is as obviously essential as the first—*opportunity of knowledge*.—The unbelief condemned in the Bible is not that which arises from unavoidable or involuntary ignorance:—for this, indeed, cannot with propriety be denominated unbelief at all. No man can be said to *disbelieve* that which he has not the means of *knowing*; that which, from whatever circumstances, has never been brought before his mind. This, it is plain, can never be a legitimate ground of condemnation. The Bible condemns no man for not knowing what he never heard of, or for not believing

In such cases, it must be obvious, there can be no responsibility. There is one apparent exception indeed—when the mental powers have been disordered in their exercise, and bereft of their energy, by *moral* causes,—by any description, for example, of dissipation and profligacy. But the exception, after all, is only apparent: for in such instances, the person's guilt does not properly consist in his not exerting a capacity of which he is not possessed, but in his having, by his previous misconduct, deprived himself of that capacity.

what he could not know,—for not obeying a law which was never promulgated to him, or not receiving a message which never reached his ears. No such thing. The principles of the Bible on this subject are those of the most unimpeachable equity. Ignorance is criminal, only when it arises from wilful inattention, or from aversion of heart to truth. Unbelief involves guilt, when it is the effect and manifestation of the same aversion,—of a want of *will* to that which is right and good.

The necessity of the third thing mentioned to the criminality of unbelief, namely *sufficiency of evidence*, may be confirmed by an appeal to the very highest authority, that of the Divine Author of the gospel himself. Look to John xv. 22, 24. "If I had not come and spoken to them, they had not had sin; but now they have no cloak for their sin. If I had not done among them the works which no other man did, they had not had sin; but now have they both seen and hated both me and my Father."—In this

passage, all the three particulars may be considered as united;—the second and third being expressly specified, and the first clearly presupposed. The statement of the Saviour is, that, had they been without either means of knowledge or sufficiency of proof, or, by obvious implication, natural capacity of apprehending the meaning and discerning the evidence of what was taught them, they should not have been chargeable with sin, in rejecting his claims, in denying his doctrine;—there would have been no guilt in their unbelief.

But here a question comes in our way, of essential consequence in our present investigation—a turning point in the inquiry:—What is to be understood by *sufficiency of evidence?*—Essential, however, as the question is, it is so only in some of its general principles. It is not necessary that we take upon us (what would be far beyond our province as creatures) to specify, theoretically and *a priori*, the precise description and amount of evidence which the Divine Being

should be required to furnish, as sufficient to establish, to the satisfaction of his intelligent creatures, a testimony from himself. Such principles as I shall now proceed very briefly to state, seem enough for our purpose.

First of all, then, the principle itself already laid down, must be universally admitted as an obvious and incontrovertible one, —that a revelation which men are *required* to believe, and unbelief of which incurs condemnation and punishment, *must* be accompanied with evidence really sufficient of its Divine original. This, it is manifest, is the only ground on which a command to believe can legitimately rest, or a threatening of punishment to unbelief be susceptible of vindication.—And this being granted, it is further clear, that the Author of the testimony, who is at the same time the author of our rational constitution, and who "knows what is in man," and has a perfect discernment of the description of evidence which the nature of the case admits, and which the reason

of the creature requires, must have it in his power to produce such a proof as shall, in kind and in measure, be adapted to both, and such therefore as shall be *reasonably sufficient* for the conviction of every one, possessed of intellect, to whom it shall be presented.

But there is another general principle not less obvious than these,—that *sufficient evidence* must not be understood to mean such evidence as shall *infallibly constrain* the believing assent of every individual. When the subject is a physical force, applied for the accomplishment of a physical purpose,—the raising of a weight, for instance, or the removal of an obstacle;—if the force have a direct and fair application, we judge of its *sufficiency* by its *efficiency*:—if the weight is not raised, if the obstacle does not give way,—the conclusion is, that the power is not sufficient. But it is not thus we must form our judgment on subjects of moral evidence. Such evidence every discerning mind must at once perceive, may

be fully sufficient, without being efficient. The want of efficacy may arise, not from any deficiency in the evidence, but from causes in the mind to which the evidence is presented. If these causes consist in, or arise from, *natural incapacity*, they exonerate the party from blame-worthiness. But if they be of a *moral* kind,—if they are to be found in evil principles and passions in the heart, blinding the understanding, perverting truth, and resisting evidence; the guilt contracted, whether the unbeliever be himself sensible of it or not, may be very deep.—In the physical analogy used above, it is assumed that the power employed has a direct and fair application. It is only on this supposition that the conclusion of its insufficiency, from its failing to produce the effect, is legitimate. The position, or shape, or other circumstances, of the weight or the obstacle, may interfere with the free contact and advantageous application of the power:—in which case its failure may be imputable, not to its intrinsic insufficiency, but to those

untoward circumstances. In a similar way, the character and situation of human minds may obstruct the legitimate operation of evidence upon them, and culpably hinder the admission of obnoxious truth.

That there may be evidences and indications of truth, which are in themselves sufficient, and which yet do not lead to the knowledge and conviction of it, may be satisfactorily shown from another department of Divine discovery. Respecting the manifestations of God in the works of nature as enjoyed by the Heathen, the Apostle Paul says, Rom. i. 20. "For the invisible things of God, even his eternal power and godhead, are clearly seen from the creation of the world, being understood by the things that are made: so that they are without excuse." —It is, in these words, evidently assumed, or, rather, explicitly asserted, that there *are*, in the works of creation, demonstrations sufficiently clear and convincing of the being and perfections of God:—so that, if men are *not* led to right views of these subjects, it

is not for want of adequate manifestation or evidence of the truth. It is on this ground alone that the conclusion, "*they are without excuse*," can possibly be maintained.—Their ignorance could not be inexcusable, were their means of knowledge not sufficient:—their failure to discover the truth would be blameless, in proportion as the sources of discovery were obscure or scanty.

In the 28th verse of the same chapter, the cause is assigned why the clear and multiplied evidences of the existence and attributes of God which present themselves in creation and providence, did not lead men to the right knowledge, and faith, and worship, of the One Supreme:—"They DID NOT LIKE to retain God in their knowledge." This is the simple cause, then, why the knowledge of God was lost, that is conveyed in his WORKS. There was no relish for the lesson,—no complacency in the discovery;—it was not in unison with the tendencies of man's fallen nature. The knowledge was originally possessed. It did not require,

therefore, to be *discovered*, but only to be *remembered*. Yet with every possible advantage for its being retained, it was, notwithstanding, lost: and, in the passage of scripture I have just referred to, the loss is expressly ascribed to a moral cause.—If these things be so, might we not reasonably expect, that the same cause should operate in a similar way, in regard to the knowledge of God communicated in his WORD? That it *does* so operate, is precisely what our text affirms. There is a perfect coincidence between the statement of the Apostle respecting the knowledge imparted by nature and tradition, and that of our Lord respecting the discoveries of the gospel. When the one says, "They did not like to retain God in their knowledge,"—and the other, "Light is come into the world, and men have loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil;" there is an expression, in different terms, of the same principle, producing the same result.—The language of our Lord is without exception, as to all who

reject the gospel testimony. The grounds of this universality are afterwards to be considered. At present, all that we notice is, the *sameness of the cause* assigned for the ignorance and rejection of the contents of *both* the volumes of divine discovery.

This naturally leads me to observe, that of the undiscerned and inefficacious evidence a great deal may be found to lye in the *contents themselves* of the rejected revelation. It is reasonable, from analogy, to expect that this should be the case. If the impress of the Divine character is borne by the *other* works of God; much more might we look for it here,—in a direct communication from himself of his mind and will. We might conclude, *a priori*, that its nature should indicate its origin;—that it should be "its own witness." That multitudes to whom this revelation comes do not discern in it these traces of Deity, is obviously no valid proof that it does not contain them. From the matter of fact which presents itself throughout the Heathen world, that men

have failed to deduce right conceptions of God from the works of creation, Deists and sceptics do not think of drawing the inference that these works *do not contain* sufficient indications of his being and perfections. They maintain their sufficiency; and on this very ground question the necessity of revelation. They speculate on the clearness and fulness of the lessons of nature; showing, in the superiority of their speculations to those of philosophers who have not had their advantages, that they derive their unacknowledged light from the very revelation which they proudly disown. And yet, while they thus loftily and confidently speculate, the very same principles may be preventing *them* from discerning the marks of Deity *in the Bible*, that prevent *the Heathen* from discovering these marks *in nature*. The communications made in it *may not be to their minds*. They may not *like* them.—There is indeed the greater likelihood of this in the one case than in the other, inasmuch as in the written revelation we look for more of the discov-

ery of the *moral* perfections of God, than in the works of his hands. And it is these that are the more direct objects of human aversion. The others, usually distinguished by the designation of his *natural* attributes, are obnoxious to dislike, chiefly, perhaps I should say solely, in consequence of their connection with these. From this cause it not unfrequently happens, that when, in their minds or in their discourse, men can separate the two, we may hear a great deal of the language of seemingly devout eulogy of Deity, from the lips of those who, alas! make it sadly manifest otherwise, that they have no spiritual relish for the excellences of his moral nature,—his purity and justice, and infinite separation from all evil. How many specimens of such commendation,—elegant sometimes, and sublime, and captivating,—are furnished by the discourses of natural historians and philosophers;—in which God appears as a wonderful artist and generous benefactor, incomparable in skill, transcendent in power, and inexhaustible in bounty:

whilst to the very eulogists themselves, the Bible views of his holiness and grace would prove insufferably offensive.

From all this, then, you will, I trust, be sensible, that *manifestation* and *evidence* may be *sufficient*, and *even superfluous*, and yet those to whom they are presented be neither enlightened nor convinced by them. The cause of the failure may lie *in themselves;* and it may be evil,—deeply evil,—and the just ground of condemnation.—It is admitted, that, to be a legitimate ground of moral responsibility, the unbelief must be affected by moral causes, and that it can involve guilt, only as springing from an evil heart. That in regard to the discoveries of the gospel, it must be influenced by such causes, is evident from the very nature of those discoveries. The gospel is not a merely speculative doctrine. It is not, in this respect, of the nature of abstract propositions, in geometry or metaphysics. It is, in its substance and tendency, moral. The very *facts* of the gospel may be truly denominated *moral*

facts; inasmuch as they contain in them the display of the purest and most sublime *moral principles*, and the enforcement upon the conscience of the highest *moral motives*. Now, whatever is thus, in its nature and tendencies, moral, *must* either harmonize on the one hand, or conflict on the other, with the moral state of the heart. The latter, as we have seen, is peremptorily affirmed, in the text and other parts of scripture, to be the case between the discoveries of the gospel and the principles and feelings of the natural or unrenewed man. This opposition is, without exception or qualification, declared, by the lips of the gracious Author of the gospel himself, to be the cause of the rejection of his testimony:—and it now becomes my province, depending on Divine aid, to endeavour to make good the position, that ALL UNBELIEF OF THE GOSPEL HAS ITS ORIGIN IN EVIL.

Leaving, however, the establishment of this position to another discourse, I shall conclude the present by repeating, that such

is the unequivocal affirmation of the scriptures. Now the word that contains the affirmation is proved to be Divine, by an immense accumulation of the most conclusive evidence. I therefore believe, that the God himself who searches the heart has declared unbelief to be a sin inferring the pains of hell. I am assuredly satisfied that this it *cannot* do, except as arising from an *evil heart.* It is not for me to enter into the heart's secrets. This is *his* prerogative. And if he who "knoweth all things" has declared the source of unbelief to be evil, I might leave it with himself to convict the conscience of the truth of his own authoritative testimony. An attempt to prove it, however, may serve to detect some of the modes of prevailing self-deception; and, by undeceiving the self-deluded, to save their souls from death.

DISCOURSE II.

JOHN III. 18, 19.

"*He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.*"

I NOW proceed, as proposed in the conclusion of the former discourse, to illustrate and prove the position, that ALL UNBELIEF OF THE GOSPEL HAS ITS ORIGIN IN EVIL.

I have already more than once repeated the principle, so essential in this discussion, that, in order to unbelief being the subject of moral responsibility at all, it must have

some connection with the exercise of the will; and that, to constitute it a ground of just condemnation, it must have its source in an evil heart.—There can be no reasonable question, that, if it *does* arise from such a source, the sentence against it is fair and righteous. The only remaining inquiry, therefore, is, whether the position announced for proof be capable of establishment:—whether unbelief be, or be not, in all cases, the effect and indication of some morally evil principle.—This you will perceive, defines and limits our subject of investigation. The Bible, we have seen, affirms, frequently and implicitly, that it *is* so; and on this ground, pronounces its damnatory sentence. —I might, as I noticed in closing last discourse, leave the matter here, in the assurance that God can bring home his own word to the conviction of every conscience, and constrain the unbelieving sinner to acknowledge its truth.—It may be of use, however, to vindicate the sentence; and in doing so, to detect and expose some of the various fal-

lacies by which men are prevented from perceiving and owning it to be as the Bible has said. The heart has been pronounced, by Him who best knows it, "deceitful above all things;" and in thousands of ways, accordingly, does it successfully impose upon itself. It is no proof of its being otherwise than the Bible represents it to be, that men are not sensible of it, but are disposed to question and to deny it. This may be only a manifestation of the heart's deceitfulness. It is of the very nature of depravity, to make the subject of it insensible of the extent to which it exists, and of the force with which it operates, in his own bosom. To impart sensibility to its existence and influence, is the very first step of the Holy Spirit's work in conversion:—he "*convinces of sin.*" He gives the sinner to see his real character, and to feel deeply what before had never affected or troubled him. And it may be stated as a fact, which admits of no exceptions, that there never was an individual brought to the faith of "the gospel of the grace of God,"

who did not humbly acknowledge, whatever might be the notions he had previously entertained of himself, and of the causes of his unbelieving rejection of it, that he had really been under the influence of an evil and self-deceived heart,—a heart at enmity with God,—a heart, of which it had been the very deceitfulness that had made him before think well. Such has been the uniform admission of all who have believed in Christ, whatever may have been the variety (and that has been endless) of their former characters.

And this diversity of character amongst unbelievers is *still* endless;—admitting of, and actually exemplifying, every modification of aspect, which principles and affections merely natural, in all their modes and measures of combination, can possibly assume. Yet, in assigning the causes of men's unbelief, we dare not abate or qualify the statement of the Bible,—that in every one of these endlessly diversified cases, it has its origin in one or other of the varieties of an evil heart,—"a heart not right with God."

I wish it to be distinctly understood, that, when I speak of unbelief, I mean unbelief of THE GOSPEL:—not *infidelity*, in the ordinary acceptation of the word;—the open and avowed rejection of the Bible as a revelation from God. There are many, very many, alas! who, though they are not infidels in this sense of the designation;—but, on the contrary, profess to believe the Bible to be the word of God, are yet lamentably ignorant of that which it chiefly reveals, or as far as they theoretically know, are decidedly opposed to it.—The Jews of our Lord's day, as we learn from his mode of addressing them, were unbelievers of this description. "Do not think," says he, "that I will accuse you to the Father: there is one that accuseth you, even Moses, in whom ye trust. For had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed me; for he wrote of me. But if ye believe not his writings, how shall ye believe my words?"*—What! it might be asked,

* John v. 45—47.

did the Jews not believe in Moses? In one sense, assuredly, they did. They believed *himself* to have had a Divine commission, and *his writings* to possess Divine authority. But they missed the substance of all that Moses wrote. "He wrote of ME," says Christ. "The testimony of Jesus was the spirit," both of the "prophecies" which he delivered, and of the entire system of ceremonial observances, which, under his mediation, was established amongst them. This they understood not. Under the influence of a perverse and worldly temper of mind, all that related to the Messiah was misinterpreted by them. They knew not and believed not in him, of whom Moses wrote as the Seed of the woman who was to bruise the head of the serpent; as the Seed of Abraham, in whom all the families of the earth were to be blessed; as the prophet, like unto himself, whom God was to raise up unto them from among their brethren, and to whom, under pain of divine vengeance, they were to hearken; as the atoning High Priest,

prefigured by Aaron in his pontifical glory; and as the propitiatory sacrifice, typified by all the victims whose blood was ordered to be shed at the altar, and to be sprinkled within the veil.—There was a perfect correspondence between the "*writings*" of Moses, and the "*words*" of Christ; so that the rejection of the latter showed their unbelief of the former. To "believe Moses" meant, not merely to believe that his writings possessed Divine authority, but to believe what those writings contained, according to its proper meaning and design. It is one thing to believe the authority by which a messenger speaks, and quite another thing to believe the message which, by that authority, he delivers. The authority may be admitted, whilst a conception materially erroneous is formed of that which is declared; and by this means, the sanction of the authority may be attached to what is false and illusory. If, in such a case, the cause of the misapprehension were found to lye in the unintelligible nature of the message, there could be nothing in it sinful:—but if it

lye in the capricious perverseness and incredulous worldliness of those to whom the message is delivered, by which they are led to make their wishes their interpreters, and to prefer *their* commentary, because it suits their secular inclinations, to the spiritual meaning of the messenger ;—if the misunderstanding be thus what we usually denominate *wilful*;—then the unbelief of the truth, and the faith of the error, may be proportionally criminal, and the divinely commissioned ambassador may rise up in the judgment, and condemn the perverters of his testimony: "There is one that accuseth you, even Moses, in whom ye trust."

Let it be remembered, then, (for on all such subjects—subjects that involve the character of the Divine Being himself, and the destinies of his creatures for eternity, there ought to be nothing ambiguous,—nothing but plain dealing,) that we consider the Bible as giving the designation of THE GOSPEL, by way of eminence and of exclusive distinction, to a certain definite and clearly express-

ed assemblage of doctrines;—the doctrines of salvation by free grace, and divine influence, on the ground of the merits and intercession of a Mediator; of the guilt and depravity, the condemnation and spiritual impotence of men; of acceptance with God by faith alone in the righteousness and atonement of Him who was "delivered up for the offences of sinners, and raised again for their justification," to the exclusion of all self-dependence and self-glorying;—of renovation of heart by the power of the Spirit, through the operation of that testimony which proclaims mercy to the chief of transgressors, and to all transgressors alike, who receive it, in simplicity of heart, as the truth of God. I mean, in a word, the scripture "record, that God hath GIVEN to us eternal life, and this life is IN HIS SON;"—that "the WAGES of sin is DEATH; but the GIFT of God is ETERNAL LIFE, THROUGH JESUS CHRIST OUR LORD."

If any shall be startled at this, and shall pronounce us illiberal and narrow-minded,

and insist upon a more general and comprehensive acceptation of the terms *Christianity* and *Gospel*,—we cannot help it. Nothing, as we conceive, can be more dishonouring to the God of the Bible, than to suppose that he has given us in it a revelation that is *not explicit* on the very subject that forms its main article, and which it is chiefly designed to set forth:—and nothing, we are confident, is more extensively injurious to the best interests of men, than a contrary sentiment, by which an indeterminate vagueness and laxity is thrown over the scriptures,—confounding things that essentially differ, and allowing almost every thing which a man may choose to think, and to say he believes, to be called by the common name of Christianity.—I am anxious, then, I repeat, that this should be marked and kept in mind. In an attempt to point out the moral causes of unbelief, all would necessarily be confusion, were that not distinctly understood which unbelief rejects. —In treatises on the evidences of Christianity, I have many a time been disappointed

and grieved at the vagueness,—and worse than vagueness, the absolute erroneousness and illegitimacy, of the modes of reasoning from the nature or genius of its peculiar discoveries; when attempts have been made to demonstrate its reasonableness, on grounds that involve a total misconception of what it really is. I have lamented, on seeing the Divine workmanship of the casket so admirably pointed out, that the value and virtues of the jewel contained in it should be so mistakenly or deficiently apprehended:—and my comfort has been, that the force and conclusiveness of the *external* evidence are not at all invalidated by an incorrect exhibition of the *internal* and *experimental*.—I have stated generally, but I trust intelligibly, the view of the Gospel on which the whole of the following reasonings proceed. In the course of the reasonings themselves, that view will be more fully brought out. The justness of them, I need hardly say, depends, to a very considerable extent, on its scriptural authority.

There are three general sources to one or other of which unbelief of the gospel may fairly, I conceive, be traced. These are *profligacy*, *thoughtlessness*, and *pride*,—the last subdividing itself into various kinds, of which the chief are also three—the pride of *worldly distinction*, the pride of *wisdom*, and the pride of *self-righteousness*.

I shall call your attention to these particulars in succession, endeavouring to show, in regard to each of them, how the principle of the text applies.

I. *In the first place*, then, there is the unbelief of PROFLIGACY.

I refer, in this particular, to men who live in open sin; whose general course of conduct proclaims to all that "there is no fear of God before their eyes;" who "walk after the sight of their eyes and the imagination of their hearts," and say, in the true spirit of undisguised rebellion "against the Lord, and against his Anointed, Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us:"—"What is the Almighty, that

we should serve him ?"—There will be little hesitation, I should presume, in admitting what the source of unbelief must be in *this* case. Here there is abundant practical manifestation of an *evil heart*. For what is the proof of inward evil principle ?—what the mark of enmity against God ? Let an inspired Apostle answer the question: "The carnal mind is enmity against God ; FOR *it is not subject to the law of God*, neither indeed can be."* Rebellion in conduct is the proof of rebellion in principle ; a bad life, the effect and evidence of a bad heart. The effect is uniform ; the evidence immediate and unequivocal. The fruit indicates the nature of the tree ; the streams the character of the fountain. "A good man, out of the good treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is good ; and an evil man out of the evil treasure, bringeth forth that which is evil."

Yet, simple and conclusive as is the prin-

* Romans viii. 7.

ciple of all such inferences from the external to the internal, from the life to the heart; even here the heart's deep deceitfulness at times evinces itself, and the proneness of human nature to palliate transgression, and to make allowances for evil. Even to the open profligate, to the devotee of vicious pleasures, to the licentious despiser of all moral and decorous restraints, how often do we hear the designation *good-hearted* applied, by some with inconsiderate lightness, and by others with a simpering and palliative sentimentalism, that passes itself, with those who cherish it, for virtue. The indulgence shown to certain kinds and courses of libertinism is such, that a man, and especially a young man, may be, in no ordinary degree, wild and dissolute, without forfeiting the credit of a good heart:—"He is not so correct, to be sure, as he ought to be; but he has great goodness of heart about him; he is no one's enemy but his own."—But this is only one of the numberless delusions, by which men impose upon themselves and one another. It

arises from that over-looking of God in their estimates of evil;—from that deep seated principle of *ungodliness*, which is the deadly and pervading sin of our whole nature. All disobedience is the expression and evidence of evil principle,—of a heart, whatever may be its natural affections towards fellow-creatures, at variance with the character and the will of God.

Now it is surely no matter for wonder, that the gospel, which contains a discovery so full and so impressive of the holy purity of the Divine Being, of the hateful and damning nature of all sin, and of the certainty and fearfulness of the sanctions of a broken law,—should find no relish or ready acceptance here. It is no wonder, that it should be refused admission; and that such men, sensible that it condemns them, should seek to quiet their consciences and find ease to themselves in their vicious courses, by discovering and retailing the most plausible objections to it. They "walk after their

own lusts, and say, Where is the promise of his coming?"

Even such characters are sometimes known to take up, amongst other grounds of rejection, the common charge against the gospel, of its slackening the restraints of moral obligation, and thus tending to immorality and licentiousness. How passing strange!—What anomalous, unaccountable presumption!—It is one amongst the many demonstrative evidences of the falsehood of such an allegation against the gospel, that *the licentious are its enemies.* Were the charge well founded, they of all men, instead of hating and opposing it, would try to persuade themselves of its truth. It would be acceptable, and palatable. It would have all the recommendation of good news. For nothing assuredly could be more welcome to a licentious man, than to be told how he might "continue in sin," and yet "grace abound." The very disposition of the wicked to oppose the gospel should be considered as a testi-

mony from them to its holy tendency. If it encouraged sin, it would be a favourite with the sinner. The real cause of the opposition of such persons is stated by Christ in the verses immediately following the text:— "For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved. But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God."

It is unnecessary to enlarge on this particular. It will hardly be questioned, that in the unbelief of characters of this first description, there may fairly be concluded to be the operation of evil principle:—and if there be, there must be guilt. Theirs is surely, if it is anywhere at all to be found, the "evil heart of unbelief." Their hostility to the gospel is dictated by alienation from God. There can here be no reasonable hesitation to apply the words of the text: "This is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and that men loved

darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil."

II. The *second* description of unbelief which I proposed to notice, is that of THOUGHTLESSNESS, OR INCONSIDERATION.

This, perhaps, would be more correctly designated the *absence of faith*, than *positive unbelief*. It possesses more, certainly, of the nature of a negation; inasmuch as a man can hardly, with propriety, be said either to believe or disbelieve what he has never considered. Yet with whom, unless with unbelievers, can the inattentive and inconsiderate be classed? All must come under the general denomination, who have the means of knowledge, and continue regardless;—and negative as their unbelief may be, it is deeply criminal, and alas! most extensively prevalent.—The persons of whom I now speak, and of whom the multitude is so great, are not, like the class of whom I have already spoken, open profligates. They are not addicted to any of those courses which the world calls vicious. They may

even in their lives be sober, decent, and respectable. But they are immersed in the businesses, the amusements, and the social intercourse of life. In enjoying the pleasures, and pursuing the acquisitions of the world, each according to his taste, or according to the peculiarity of controlling circumstances, with all the ceaseless bustle of eager emulation,—they are thoroughly employed; —their time and their attention quite taken up. They go on in this course from day to day, and from year to year, without a serious thought being devoted to the inquiry, unutterably momentous as it is, whether the gospel be true or false. There is no fixing them to the subject. They have other things to mind. There is for ever something ready with an imperious claim for present precedence. They say to all who would invite them to serious reflection, and they say to the occasional convictions of their own minds, "Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season I will call for thee." They are far from being resolved never to think.

But they cannot think *now:* and, as each hour of the future becomes successively present, the same apology recurs, and the time for thinking never arrives. It continues always a time *to come.* They fancy indeed they do no great harm: they are busy; they have not leisure; and they cannot help it. They flatter themselves, that it is rather a thing they *cannot* than a thing they *will not* do. Conscience may at particular moments be sensible of a misgiving twinge: but it is neither severe nor lasting. It is easily suppressed, and quickly forgotten, amidst the "vain stir" of the world, and the countenance of ten thousand examples.

Such persons will not admit that they are unbelievers, and would be grievously offended were you to call them so. But unbelievers the Bible pronounces them; and little as they may think of it, their unbelief is far from innocent.—Is there no guilt, think you, my hearers, in refusing, or even neglecting, to examine what professes to come from the infinite God?—in trifling with his claims?—

in putting off his demands to be heard?—in preferring the world, in any of its forms, to him and to his proffered love?—in treating with lightness and disregard what he pronounces, and, as "the only wise God," cannot but pronounce, of incomparably higher importance than the objects on which these persons expend their thoughts, their time, their labour, their anxieties, and their regrets?—Is there no guilt in the apology offered for such neglect—"We have no time?" What! Have you not your time from God? Is it not in him that "you live, and move, and have your being?" And has he no right to dictate how that time shall be employed?—no title to claim any portion of it for himself?—or what he *does* claim, are you at liberty to refuse him?—And yet, it is not so much for himself that he makes the demand:—it is for your own best interests. It is not the demand of angry authority, insisting on homage: it is the demand of tender mercy, wooing its object to happiness, and making that your duty, which he knows

to be your felicity. He can be happy without you;—you cannot, without Him. You cannot in time; you cannot in eternity. Your refusal, therefore, to listen to his voice, is characterized not less by ingratitude, than by impiety and folly. What! no time—presumptuous worm of the dust—no time to think of God!—"the God, in whose hand thy breath is, and whose are all thy ways!"—on whom thou dependest for every instant of that life, which thou art spending in despiteful disregard of Him!—to whose justice every thing has been more than forfeited by thee, and who, in sovereignty, and in righteousness, has thy being and thy well-being at his disposal!—No time to think of God!—of his nature and character—of his relations to thyself—of his claims upon thee—of the intimations to thee of his mind and will—of his denunciations of vengeance, and his kind proposals for thy good!—And is there no criminality in drawing excuses from *self* for *forgetfulness of God*;—from *time*, for the neglect of *eternity*;—from "trifles light

as air," for disregard of the weighty interests of the immortal soul,—which God has shown that he values so highly, by *doing* so much, and *giving* so much for its redemption! O! if it be true, that God has "so loved the world as to give his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him might not perish but have everlasting life,"—is there no guilt in slighting this love and this life?

Let me suppose a son to have transgressed against his father, and to have incurred his merited and heavy displeasure. The affectionate parent is anxious to speak with him. His bowels yearn over his child. He longs, painfully longs, to open his heart. He has proposals of forgiveness, and of returning kindness to make to him, to bring him to a right mind, to subdue him to penitential sorrow, and restore him to confidence and favour. With the dignified energy and persuasive tenderness of paternal affection, he addresses him:—and the stubborn and scorn-

full youth turns short on his heel, and tells him *he has not time to hear him*—he has got *other things to mind;* discovering at once contempt of his father's displeasure, and supercilious disregard of the offers of his reconciliation and love! Would not you, with indignant severity, pronounce on such conduct the unhesitating sentence of reprobation, as unnatural, and monstrous? Would not you be shocked by his light-heartedness, by his busy application to other concerns, and by every indication about him of his being, in such circumstances, capable of any enjoyment? O how much more, then, ought you to be shocked, when you see a sinner refusing to listen to the voice of a beseeching God?—telling him he has not leisure to attend to what he says!—"making light" of his invitations, and going off "to his farm or his merchandise!" Surely the language of God to such is right, and reasonable, and just—"Therefore, it is come to pass, that, as I cried, and they would not hear;

so they cried, and I would not hear, saith the Lord of Hosts."*

If we *are* at a loss to find ground of application for the words of our text—"*their deeds were evil*"—to *this* case, surely we *ought not* to be so. The *principle* of the whole character of such men is evil. For what is it? Is it not a preference of the world to God? How amazing the deceitfulness and wickedness of the heart—that allows men to be guilty of this without the consciousness of its being evil! Evil it is; and deeply evil: and all the *deeds* that are dictated by such a principle, partake of the evil of their principle, and incur righteous condemnation. Men may fondly flatter themselves, that whilst, in their pursuit of the world, they give every man his due, add humanity to justice, and do harm to nobody—no one has any title to say aught against them. But they forget, that there is ANOTHER who demands HIS due,—and who,

* Zech. 7. 13.

as his due, seeks the affectionate homage of a believing heart, and the practical service of a godly as well as a sober and righteous life: —they forget, that *so long as the heart is not his*, all is evil—evil only—evil continually: and to the unbelief of inconsiderate thoughtlessness the words of the text may, without any hesitating qualification, be legitimately applied:—"This is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil."

Were a man to neglect his worldly business, and the temporal interests of his family, and to assign as his reason, that he was so entirely taken up about the concerns of his soul and of eternity, that he really could find no leisure to "mind earthly things,"—his apology would not be sustained;—nor would it be right that it should:—for it is part of the enjoined character of the godly man, that he be "not slothful in business," and it is the recorded decision of heaven, that "if any man provide not for his own,

and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel." The beauty of religion, too, consists in giving every duty, to self, to man, and to God, its proper time, place, and measure. And whilst, on these grounds, the person who should offer such a plea could not have the approbation even of those who fear God,—he would meet, poor man! with little sympathy and little quarter from the ungodly world. Every mouth would be open against him, in the severity of censure, the sneer of affected pity, or the bitterness of sarcastic contumely. The censure, I have admitted, would be just. The man's "deeds would be evil."—But let us look at the case. Shall a heavy censure be made to light on the man who neglects time for eternity, and *he* pass without rebuke who neglects eternity for time? Shall the defence be sustained that pleads the incessant occupations of the present world as precluding the possibility of attending to the concerns of the world to come; whilst the plea is thrown over the bar

as unsound and frivolous, that would vindicate the want of interest about the concerns of the present from the absorbing influence of an intense solicitude about that which is future and eternal? Put time and eternity, with their respective interests, into opposite scales,—and tell me which is the heavier, and of which the claims are the most imperious. If you hold as valid the apology from the engagements of time for inconsideration about eternity, the opposite apology should be admitted to possess a validity superior in conclusiveness, in the precise ratio (if you can estimate it) of eternity to time!—I have already said, that in neither case is the plea well-founded:—but on the supposition that the *principle* of it were at all admissible, the *strength* of it would be greater, even by infinitude itself, in the one case than in the other;—and if on both sides there be guilt and folly, I need not say in what relative proportions.

Let it not be alleged, that the concerns of this world are *present*, and those of the world

to come *future;*—that what is present has the first and most immediate claim; and that he is therefore more culpable who neglects the present for the future, than he who neglects the future for the present.—The pretext is futile, on two obvious grounds. In the first place, the interests of a never-ending existence are so transcendently superior in magnitude to those of a few transitory years, that *were it necessary* (which it is not) to the securing of the former, that the latter should be disregarded, it would, beyond all question, be the extreme of infatuation to hesitate about the alternative:—and secondly, *future* things, in this comparison, are, in a most important sense, *present*. The interests of the soul are present interests, and its preparation for eternity a present duty. It is a work that can be done only now. Were the future independent of the present, and unaffected by it, there might be wisdom in the objection. But if it be true, that our spiritual state now is to determine our everlasting destinies; then are the paramount in-

terests of eternity, in as far as regards the means of securing them, brought within the limits of time. If they are not secured now, they are lost for ever.

From all this I still conclude, that the unbelief, which springs from wilful inconsideration,—from a thoughtless preference of the engagements of this world, a preference which finds some secular claim upon every passing moment, and cannot disengage an instant for the soul and eternity,—is stamped with guilt as well as with folly.

We must all, from experience, be conscious, that *indifference* is worse to bear than *opposition*;—that to be *slighted* is more offensive than to be *resisted*. That a proposal for the benefit of another, which has cost us the expenditure of thought and time, and property, should be argued against and disapproved, we may, with some little effort of self-government, contrive to bear:—but to have it treated as if it were not worth a hearing; to see the man for whose good we have been at so much pains turn from us

with unimpressible levity and indifference, and plead some worthless trifle as having a prior claim upon his attention and time !—I put it to every one of you, whether you would not feel this a more intolerable insult, than if your plan were to be heard, opposed, and rejected? O think, then, of the insult offered to the blessed God by the slighting indifference of his sinful creatures;—an indifference which will not even listen to his proposals, but on every silly pretext that can suggest itself, turns away from him, and from all who would engage attention to him, even to trifles that, in the comparison, would not weigh the dust of the balance !—Is there no moral evil in this?—nothing for which the thoughtless and busy worldling can be justly called to account?

III. I come now, *in the third place*, to consider the unbelief of PRIDE.

This general head divides itself, as I formerly noticed, into a variety of subordinate particulars. Even the two preceding topics of discourse might, perhaps, without impro-

priety, have been comprehended underit;—the one, as the pride of *self-will*, and the other, as the pride of *careless insubordination*; and thus all the sources of unbelief might have been reduced, as logicians express it, to one category.—But the descriptions of pride to which I *now* request your attention come more directly and naturally under this common designation. They are, the pride of *wealth and station*, the pride of *wisdom*, and the pride of *self-righteousness*.

1. The pride of *wealth and station*.

Christianity fully recognises, and in no respect interferes with, the ordinary established distinctions of civil society: and they sadly mistake its nature, and betray great deficiency of sound judgment and discretion, who act as if it were otherwise; as if the faith and fellowship of the Church of God obliterated the gradations of civil rank, and gave a dispensation from all the usually acknowledged proprieties of life.—But in regard to the provisions of the gospel, the Bible *does* place all upon a level. The sal-

vation which it reveals is, in its nature, its necessity, and its means, the same to all. There is one Bible, that teaches to all the same lessons; one salvation for "high and low, rich and poor together." There are not two Saviours,—one for the rich and another for the poor. There are not two ways to heaven,—one for the rich and the other for the poor. There are not two tables spread and furnished, and two descriptions of fare provided;—there are not, in a word, two heavens,—the one for the rich, and the other for the poor. In the "communion of saints," both below and above, "the rich and the poor meet together: the Lord is the maker," and the Lord is the *Saviour*, "of them all." Both as sinners, and as saved sinners, they stand on common ground. They are "all one in Christ Jesus." They enjoy the same privileges; they are possessors of the same honours; they acknowledge the same Father and the same Lord; they join in the same worship, the worship of one God, through one Mediator, by one Spirit;

they are debtors to the same mercy, and look forward, on the same ground of hope, to the same everlasting inheritance. In the matter of salvation, from first to last, there is thus a *perfect equality*.

Now to many, this is offensive. Their pride rises at the thought of being placed on a level with the poorest and the meanest; of merging all their earthly distinctions, and joining with such in one fellowship, having blessings and privileges in common on the very same footing, children with them of the same family, and anticipating, on the same ground, the same heaven;—a heaven, where worldly dignities shall be no more,—where riches and birth confer no honour,—where, if they "sit down with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob," they must at the same time sit down with Lazarus.—"God hath chosen the poor of this world, rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which he hath promised to them that love him." Not a few among the rich and the noble, when they read this and see it realized, associate the religion of the

gospel with the ideas of meanness and vulgarity, and the simple scriptural fellowship of a church of Christ with degradation, from which they shrink with a secret or avowed disdain. They like religion "in her silver slippers;"—when her observances can be made to accord with the pomps and fashions of the world, when she condescends to take them by the hand according to their rank, and instead of rudely stripping them of every badge of distinction, politely recognises the star and the coronet. They have no objections to the church, when they can be allowed to bring the world into it along with them.

But is there *no evil* in such feelings?—nothing criminal?—nothing offensive to God?—Is not this the very same temper of mind that discovered itself in the Jews, when they were disgusted at the meanness of the Saviour's birth, and condition, and outward appearance;—"the Carpenter's Son," instead of the royal leader of the armies of Israel, surrounded with the splen-

dours of an earthly kingdom? In the language of the prophet, he "grew up before them as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground: he had no form nor comeliness, and when they saw him, there was no beauty that they should desire him: he was despised and rejected of men: they hid as it were their faces from him; he was despised, and they esteemed him not."—Is there no guilt, nothing morally wrong, in that state of mind, which allows the petty distinctions between fellow-creatures to shut out the remembrance of the infinite superiority of God?—a superiority, before which all these distinctions are "less than nothing and vanity,"—the very thought of which should throw them all into forgetfulness;—as in nature, though "one star differeth from another star in glory," the whole hemisphere of twinkling lights retire from view before the splendours of the rising sun.—Is there no sin in the state of mind, which allows the imaginary degradation of connection with an inferior to outweigh the honour of being

brought into fellowship with the infinite Jehovah? Is there no guilt in refusing the very highest dignity that God himself has to confer, because that dignity must be shared with those who are destitute of the paltry honours of this vain world? Is there no guilt in the dishonour thus put upon God by sentiments of him so low and unworthy—as if HE was to be influenced, in the bestowment of his blessings, by those little worthless differences that elevate one worm of the dust above his fellows!—Is there no guilt in slighting and disowning the offers of the "gospel of the grace of God" on such a ground?

There is, moreover, what the Bible denominates "the deceitfulness of riches." And so powerful are the seducing temptations included in the expression, that Christ himself has said, in language that may well startle the possessors of this world's abundance, "How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle,

than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God."—The language strongly intimates, how exceedingly prone the proprietors of riches are to trust in them;—to "make gold their hope, and say to the fine gold, thou art my confidence;"—to glory in their wealth as their "strong city," in the presumptuous spirit of self-sufficiency and self-dependence;—thus to forget the God who "maketh them to differ," and by whose munificent hand their undeserved abundance is bestowed,—to fancy they can do well enough without religion,—to feel as if it were beneath them,—and to leave it to *the poor*, for whom, they grant, it may be suitable, and who stand in need of its supports and consolations. As for themselves, they do not require them.

Is there no guilt in this attachment to the world?—in ungratefully forgetting God in proportion as he is liberal in his kindness?—in "forsaking the fountain of living water, and hewing out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water?"—in estimating reli-

gion, as if it were a matter of mere self-interest,—something to which a man may, if he please, have recourse, when his circumstances are felt to require it, but which otherwise he is under no obligation to mind? —Is not this spirit of worldliness the spirit of idolatry? Is it not substituting the creature for the creator,—the gift for the giver,—the cause of gratitude for its infinitely worthy object? Is there not truth and reason in what Job says—"If I have made gold my hope, or have said to the fine gold, thou art my confidence; if I rejoiced because my wealth was great, and because my hand had gotten much;——I should have denied the God that is above?" And if it be by such a state of heart,—by such a worldly, such an atheistical spirit, that a man is kept back from accepting the proposals and embracing the offers of the gospel,—is not the unbelief criminal, and worthy of condemnation?—"How CAN ye believe," said Jesus to the Jews, "who receive honour one of another, and seek not the honour that

cometh from God only?" The inability thus expressed is obviously and entirely *moral*. It is the inability of rooted and habitual worldliness to value and to relish spiritual blessings. It is the inability of the want of right principle.—And what is true of the *honours* of the world, is equally true of its *riches*:—what is true of ambition is true of covetousness; and true, indeed, of every inordinate desire after earthly things. It was this that disinclined the Jews from "coming to Christ"—from accepting his doctrine, and submitting to his authority. He himself imputes it all to their want of will,—and that want of will to the absence of the principle of godliness:—"Ye WILL NOT come unto me, that ye might have life:"—"I know you, that ye HAVE NOT THE LOVE OF GOD in you."* This description of unbelief, then, might be designated the *unbelief of worldly-mindedness*. And I repeat the question, Is there no guilt in it?—no guilt in allowing the

* John, v. 40. 42. 44.

world, and the wealth and honours and distinctions of the world, to occupy the place of the blessings of God's salvation, and to steal away the heart from him who claims it as his own!

2. I now come to the *second* of the three descriptions of pride, namely—the *pride of wisdom.*

"Jesus rejoiced in spirit, and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes."*—All along in the history of its progress, the gospel has been obnoxious to the contempt and ridicule of a vain philosophy—a "science falsely so called." It has encountered from this quarter more bitter virulence of despite than from any other. It was the scornful question of Athenian wisdom—"What will this babbler say?" and the question expresses the spirit of the "wisdom of the world" in all times and in all

* Matth. xi. 25.

places. This wisdom, and the wisdom of God, are held forth as in perfect opposition and contrast:—"For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us who are saved it is the power of God. For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent.—Where is the wise? where is the scribe? where is the disputer of this world? hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? For after that, in the wisdom of God, the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe. For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom: but we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumbling-block, and unto the Greeks foolishness; but unto them who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God. Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men. For ye see your calling, brethren,

how that not many wise men, after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: but God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; and base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are; that no flesh should glory in his presence."*—There is but little deference shown here to the wisdom of men. Its incompetency, in all that relates to the character and will of God and the way of acceptance with him, is strongly affirmed; an incompetency, ascertained by its notorious and utter failure on such subjects, after a trial of its powers for successive centuries and millenniums. Its unsuccessful researches, and fruitless labours are held up even to scorn, in contrast with the light and energy and marvellous effects of that doctrine of the

* 1 Cor. i. 18—29.

cross, which this very wisdom affected to pity as weakness, or to scoff at as folly.—So low an estimate of the powers of human reason in the things of God, by which all its lofty pretensions are so unceremoniously set aside, might itself be expected to offend not a little the indignant pride of the wise men of this world.

There are various other sources, too, to which in different degrees, according to peculiarities of constitutional or acquired character, the dislike, and consequent unbelief of these wise men may be traced.

1. The first I shall mention is, *the requisition of implicit faith.*

Those philosophers of whom I speak, possess, in more than ordinary energy, a principle common to them with all,—an aversion from having any thing *authoritatively prescribed* to them. They cannot bear to be *dictated to.* They like to exercise their own powers of invention and discovery;—to have their own systems, their own distinguishing tenets, and their respective followers and ad-

mirers. They *must* have the liberty of *thinking for themselves.* And do not imagine that I am for denying them this liberty. It is right, that they, and that every man, should enjoy, and should use it. But still, if the Bible be once admitted to be the WORD OF GOD, it follows of necessity that it requires the submission of every mind to its dictates. Whatever it reveals must be received as truth: whatever it commands must be practised as duty. This restrains the high-minded spirit of free-thinking. It represses the "airy wing" of a bold and lofty speculation. It sets down the philosopher at the feet of apostles and prophets, in the humble capacity of a learner and asker of questions. For if these men really spoke and wrote "as they were moved by the Spirit of God," then the sole inquiry, in consulting their writings, must be, "What is the meaning of their words?" When that is ascertained, there can be no liberty left to take or to reject at pleasure,—to select what we may deem worthy of adoption, and to refuse what

meets not our liking or approval. There can be no liberty to alter and amend, to add, or to diminish. The testimony of God must be taken *as it is*;—it must be received, in humble simplicity of mind, as he has given it. And this submission of the understanding to implicit and authoritative dictation, is a demand which the self-sufficient spirit of the wisdom of this world finds it especially difficult to brook—"It is a hard saying, who can hear it?"

2. A second cause of offence to the wise of this world, is, that the knowledge communicated by the gospel must be held by them in common with all,—with the most unphilosophical and illiterate,—the vulgar herd of ordinary men:—they must derive it from the same source, and must rest their faith of it on the same ground.

Those who are made "wise unto salvation" are "not many wise men after the flesh," any more than "many mighty, and many noble:"—and the philosopher is strongly tempted to nauseate a faith which is

equally within the reach of all minds, and in the reception of which his own must be brought into association with those of the common people—with many souls which

> ——— proud Science never taught to stray
> Far as the solar walk, or milky way:—

he must believe as others believe; he must relinquish all pretensions to originality, and all attempts at improvement; he must have nothing which he can appropriate and call his own, and so distinguish himself from the crowd of simple, well-meaning believers.—There are few things, I am apt to think, for which the proud philosophy of this world has a more sensitively shrinking distaste, than common, vulgar, every-day opinions.

3. The views given in the Bible, and especially in the testimony of the gospel, of *human nature*, as utterly alienated from God, —in a state of enmity against him,—in the midst of whatever is amiable and honourable towards fellow-men, still manifesting this deep-seated spirit of ungodliness,—guilty, condemned, impotent, and hopeless;—and

of the way, too, of its recovery from this "low estate," by free mercy, through the merits, the sacrifice, and the mediation of another, to the entire exclusion of all self-dependence and self-glorying;—these views are far from being such as can ever be palatable to the wisdom of this world. For of this wisdom, even in its more moderate aberrations from the Bible, human nature is the idol, and human virtue the favourite theme. In the least exceptionable of its systems, the former, in its present character, is assumed to be what the author of all created natures has been pleased to make it; and the latter, though unhappily, in this probationary state, alloyed with imperfections and frailties, and at times, through unfavourable circumstances and the force of temptation, giving place to even the excesses of evil, is yet exhibited as presenting a high average of goodness, and, in its innate dispositions and capabilities at least, bearing the impress of its Divine original. These prevailing sentiments of philosophy are at perfect variance with the statements of

the Bible; so that, even when that sacred volume is spoken of with professions of respect, its most explicit declarations are, nevertheless, under various pretexts, softened down and explained away;—for, to understand them in their plain, unvarnished import, would be intolerably degrading, and unworthy of the real dignity of man.

4. Neither can it be supposed very congenial to the high spirit of philosophy, for its ardent admirers to be told, that they cannot of themselves have a right understanding of "the things of God;"—that the most boasted powers fail here, without Divine illumination and aid;—that, amidst all their real candour and love of truth on other subjects, they are, like all other men, under the illusion of predominant prejudice upon these,—prejudice, which the Spirit of God alone can remove;—that there is a darkening film on the eye of their mind; and that they must come to the Divine Author of the Bible, to clear their mental sight of this obstruction,

and to give them spiritual discernment of his truth.

Now, the question is, Are these things so? And if, in any case, they be so, do they constitute *a right state of mind?*—a state of mind that is free of moral culpability, and which exonerates unbelief from the charge in the text? On the contrary, is there not evil in all this pride of reason and of intellectual independence? Does it not belong to that "loftiness of man" which must be "bowed down?"—Ought not men, circumstanced as they are, to be anxious to obtain, and delighted at receiving, a communication from God? And, having received it, is it not right that, with a deeply humble sense of inferiority and obligation, they should bow their minds to the acceptance of its dictates? Ought they not, moreover, to be more than satisfied, to be pleased and rejoiced, that this communication should be made equally to all,—not, in the style and matter of it, adapted for philosophers only, but suited to man-

kind at large, in their common character and universal exigencies?—that as the knowledge imparted equally concerns all, and all stand equally in need of it, it should not require the acumen and research of profound philosophy, to discover and bring it to light, but should be so written, as that "he that runs might read?"

Fancy not, that I object to the exercise of Reason in regard to religion. No. I only wish to assign it its proper province. The two questions to which Reason should apply her powers are simply, Whether the Scriptures be a revelation from God?—and, if they be, What they teach?—Now, I would ask, is the former of these inquiries what human philosophy *first and most solicitously seeks to ascertain?* Unquestionably it *ought* to be so. But *is* it so? Do philosophers in general bend their first attention to this point?—and do they come to the consideration of it with that simplicity and that solemnity of mind, which the subject alike demands;—their spirits loaded with the weight

of an inquiry so momentous, and involving results of such unspeakable consequence; and humbly and sincerely resolved, if the professed revelation shall abide the test, to settle their faith, on all the matters of which it treats, according to its decisions,—terminating their own speculations,—laying down their fancied and boasted discoveries at the feet of a Divine Instructor,—complying with the apostolic admonition, "If any man among you seemeth to be wise in this world, let him become a fool that he may be wise,"—glad to find repose in the unerring testimony of heaven, from tossing on the troubled sea of conjecture and doubt? How rarely is such a course pursued by the wise men of the world! And one reason, it is to be feared, why the Divine authority of the Bible does not, as it ought, engage their first and most anxious inquiry, is the secret consciousness, that if it *do* possess such authority, it must bind them down,—it must command their assent,—it must destroy, as they conceive, their freedom of thought;—

and they cannot bear this: they feel, in the native "vanity of their minds," a higher pleasure in roving at large on the sea of sceptical speculation, troubled as it is, and strewn with wreeks, than in the peaceful security of the harbour of faith.

Thus, as the poet expresses it,

> "In pride, in reas'ning pride, the error lies,
> All would be Gods, and rush into the skies:"

and his words express no more than what might have been anticipated from the manner in which sin found its entrance into our world. It came in the form of *ambition*. It was insinuated into the soul, as a secret aspiring wish after interdicted knowledge,—a wish to have the tempting assurance verified, "Ye shall be AS GOD, knowing good and evil." The high-minded pretensions of human wisdom, its dissatisfaction with Divine communications, its confidence in its own powers, and attachment to its own discoveries, are in perfect harmony with this origin of our apostasy, and may be reckoned

among the indications of its truth.—Faith implies the distrust and renunciation of our own wisdom in "the things of God," and the entire submission of the mind to Divine teaching:—and the unbelief that springs from a state of mind opposite to this must be placed to the account of a pride of heart, such as God has declared he will hold at a distance. He "resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the lowly." "The proud he knoweth afar off."

3. The last of the three descriptions of pride to which I conceived unbelief might be traced, is the *pride of self-righteousness.*

This is a principle which exists in great force in human nature, and, although discovering itself under different modifications, is common to all. The statements of the Bible inform us, that while man continued in his original innocence, he held his happy life on the ground of his own obedience. This was the *Divine appointment* concerning him. But when man had sinned, this state of things came to an end. A Saviour was then

revealed, and a scheme of acceptance entirely new, adapted to his new situation and character. It then became, equally with the former, the *divine appointment*, that man, as a fallen creature, should seek and obtain life, on the ground of free mercy, through faith in that Saviour. From that time forward, the attempt to find life otherwise, by reverting to the original ground, and fancying again to deserve it, has been an act of presumptuous rebellion. It is as much, as I formerly hinted, the *law*, or *divine enactment*, *now*, that sinners shall be *saved by grace*, as it was *at first* that man should *live by his obedience*; and the desire or endeavour now to obtain life by our own righteousness, is as distinctly opposition to the declared will of God, as the eating of the forbidden fruit was.

But this is a view of the case which our proud nature does not like. There is in every bosom a clinging to self,—a fondness for something of our own as our plea with God, and an extreme backwardness to relin-

quish our hold of it. The disposition manifests itself in an endless variety of ways, amongst all descriptions of character, from the highest example of worldly correctness, down to the veriest wretch that disgraces the society of a jail. All have their righteousness,—some positive good, or some negation of evil, which, however little it recommends them to fellow-creatures, they flatter themselves may have its weight with God, to disarm his vengeance, and procure them some portion of favour. Such is the infatuating power of this principle, that the very last thing which a sinner can be induced to give up is this inveterate attachment to something in himself as his recommendation to God.

But all unbelief that arises from this source has in it, if there be truth in the Bible, the very spirit and essence of rebellion. Surely, in the ear of every holy being, the *self-righteousness of a sinner* must sound as the very strangest possible anomaly and contradiction. It is the first duty of a sinner, instead of attempting self-justification, to

confess his guilt, and plead for mercy; and with humility, and gratitude, and joy, to accept that mercy in the way in which his offended Maker has been graciously pleased to offer it. To spurn at this, is to add to the spirit of rebellion that of the foulest ingratitude. The justly offended Sovereign was under no obligation to provide means of recovery for sinful men. "He and his throne would have been guiltless," had he left them to perish. Yet he has wrought in their behalf such wonders of mercy, as make us, by their very magnitude, incredulous of their reality. From what the *power* of God *has done*, we infer that there is nothing but what involves a contradiction which it *cannot do*. As all the effects of creative power must necessarily be *finite*, we can have no proof but such an inferential one, of power that is *infinite*. But we have higher and more direct evidence of infinite *benevolence*. It has actually bestowed a gift of *infinite value*: for "God so loved the world, as to give his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in

him might not perish, but have everlasting life." This is a gift of which the worth can never be estimated, for it is truly and properly *divine* :—and the bestowment of it ought to draw from the inmost soul of every one who hears of it the simple but deep-felt utterance of apostolic praise—" Thanks be unto God for his UNSPEAKABLE GIFT." Men profess to be charmed with the scripture assurance, that God " *delighteth in mercy :*" and yet, in rejecting the grace of the gospel, they reject the grand manifestation of its truth; and, by their reliance on themselves, and their attempts to recommend themselves to God, and make out some claim upon him, by their own doings, they deprive the gospel of its very nature, as a revelation of mercy. Pure mercy is of its very essence : and, though, for securing the honour of divine justice, it is mercy through a Mediator, yet this does not render the mercy the less entirely gratuitous to the sinful creature. And he who will not consent to the utter renunciation of dependence on his own fancied

merits, and to be a debtor to mercy alone, is in the full spirit of opposition to the God of the Gospel.

And is there, think you, no *evil* in that state of heart, that prevents a *sinful creature* from bowing his spirit to the mercy of his justly offended God?—that disposes him to spurn away the offers of sovereign grace, and refuse to be its debtor?—vainly to fancy that he can be his own Saviour, and make good his title to heaven?—Is it not right that a *sinner* should be a *suppliant?*—that his pride should be abased?—his high-mindedness laid in the dust?—that, instead of coming to God with the lofty port of the self-justifying pharisee, he should come with the "broken and contrite spirit" of the publican, crying "God be merciful!"—not presenting a claim, but petitioning for a favour;—not appealing to justice, but imploring clemency? Is it not as it ought to be, when, before the spotless purity of that God who "is light, and in whom there is no darkness at all," he sees, and feels, and owns, every

thing about himself to be defective and tainted, all unworthy the acceptance of such a Being,—and when he throws himself at the footstool of the eternal throne,—the throne of the Divine holiness,—self-condemned, and pleading the name and the merits of the appointed Mediator?—Is not all this what really *becomes a sinner?* Is not this his proper posture, his proper temper, his proper petition, his proper plea? Ought not such a creature to take shame to himself, and to give God the glory? And must it not come from an "*evil heart*," that such a creature *cannot bring himself* to the humiliation of an unconditional surrender? It is the very first thing to which a sinner *is* called,—(and is it not the very first thing to which he *ought* to be called?)—to *submit to mercy.* The religion of a sinner must begin with this. It is the first right feeling in his heart towards the God with whom he has to do. If God has revealed himself to sinners, the religion of sinners must regard him *as so revealed;* and if he is revealed as exercising

free mercy, through the righteousness, atonement, and intercession, of a Mediator,—then the first principle of religion in a sinner's bosom must be the acceptance of this mercy,—the humble acquiescence of the soul in the offers of unconditional grace. *All is radically wrong*, till he is brought to this. He is under the power of an evil heart,—of a high, self-willed, unsubmissive spirit,—than which, if we are to give credit to the Bible, there is no temper of mind more offensive to God.

And "*the deeds are evil*" that are performed in such a state of heart,—that are dictated by such a principle,—that have in them a spirit so utterly unbefitting a sinful creature, the spirit of *self-recommendation*. God must hold his place. The majesty of holiness unites, in his administration, with the condescensions of grace. His throne is the throne of purity, as well as of love. The acceptance of sinners, and their restoration to his favour, must be consistent with the claims of his righteousness, as well as

with the dictates of his clemency. It must not be, that the infinite Jehovah compromise his honour, to gratify the wayward humour, and haughty self-sufficiency of a sinful worm of the dust! It must not be, that God be disregarded, in order that man may be exalted!—that when He holds out the kind offer of unconditional mercy, and the indignant rebel refuses submission, he should change his counsels, relinquish his claims, and receive him on other terms! It must not be, that the sinning creature dictate to his Divine Sovereign the conditions of his own capitulation! It must not be, that the very principle of a rebel's apostasy be indulged and cherished by the method of his recovery,—and that the jewels be wrenched from the crown of the Eternal to adorn the brow that scorned to bow itself to his footstool!—GRACE is what is offered:—grace is what alone *can* be offered:—and the sinner by whom grace is refused seals his own condemnation. The refusal comes from a proud, and therefore from an evil heart.

From the general position, that *all unbelief of the gospel has its origin in evil*, and from much of what has been said in the proof and illustration of it, many of you, I fear, may have set me down as exceedingly narrow-minded and uncharitable. I cannot help it. I must say, with Balaam, though I trust from a better principle, "I cannot go beyond the word of the Lord, to say less or more." I dare not indulge a charity for the sentiments and motives of infidelity,—or an unbelieving disregard and rejection of the gospel of Christ,—such as would contradict, or go beyond, the testimony of that Book which I believe to be the Word of the SEARCHER OF HEARTS.—I am deeply conscious, that the natural tendencies of *my own* heart are in unison with the mortifying statements of that Book, and stand in constant need of a counteracting influence: and upon the verdict of the Divine record, confirmed by observation of mankind, I am satisfied that the natural tendencies of *all* hearts, however otherwise diversified, are in opposi-

tion to what is so authoritative, so humbling, and so holy:—and that, wherever these tendencies have been overcome,—where self-will has been subdued, where pride has been abased, where enmity has been softened, where corruption has given way to the self-evidencing power of the truth,—the happy effects have resulted from an influence more than human,—even from the operation of that Divine Spirit, of whom it was said, by the Saviour himself, "When He is come, He will convince the world of sin, because they believe not on me."—But the nature and necessity of his work are topics which, however interesting and important, are beyond the limits (though bordering very closely upon them) of my present discussion.

I have before remarked, and now repeat the observation, that the confessions of all who have in earnest embraced the gospel, or, as the Apostle expresses it, "received the love of the truth, that they may be saved," are in harmony with the conclusion

which we have been endeavouring to establish. Whatever may have been the varieties of their previous characters, they all unite in the humble and penitential acknowledgment, either that, during the period of their unbelief, the truth had been resisted by self-will, and pride, and enmity of heart, or that they had been deeply guilty, in their careless disregard and neglect of it. Whenever a sinner is brought to the true knowledge and faith of the gospel, he is filled with self-abasement, and shame;—he owns the criminality of his previous hostility or carelessness;—and, deeply sensible that the difference between his former and his present self is to be ascribed to God,—his heart swelling with the emotions of grateful love,—he says, with no affected lowliness, but in sincere prostration of spirit—"By the grace of God I am what I am!"

In a great congregation there is necessarily a great diversity of character and condition. There may be now hearing me more or fewer of all the descriptions of persons

of whom I have been led to speak;—the profligate,—the careless,—the rich,—the learned,—the self-righteous. We cannot enter into the heart of each individual, and directly apply the doctrine of God to his or her peculiar views, and feelings, and tendencies. We must, in a great measure, "draw the bow at a venture." But the omniscient God can guide the arrow. And when we select a number of shafts from his quiver, he can direct each to the conscience and heart which it is especially fitted to pierce. With Him I leave the effect of all that has been said, in the persuasion of its consistency with his revealed will.

I know, at the same time, that I have been addressing myself to not a few, to whom it has been "given, in the behalf of Christ, to believe in his name;"—who have been convinced of their sinfulness, and guilt, and righteous condemnation, and have fled to the despised Saviour, as their only refuge, and their only hope.—Give the praise, my brethren, where it is due. To the grace of

God you owe it, that you are not still "in the gall of bitterness, and bond of iniquity," —"loving darkness rather than light,"— "without Christ, and without hope."—Let a sense of your obligation make you anxious to show the practical influence of your faith. Let all your words, and all your actions, be brought to the test of that holy light which you have received. Formerly, you "came not to the light, lest your deeds should be reproved:" come now to the light, "that your deeds may be made manifest that they are wrought in God." Let the spirit of faith be the spirit of holiness and of love,—the spirit of practical godliness. In proportion to the simplicity and steadfastness of your faith, will be the stability of your peace, and the unreservedness and constancy of your obedience. By the unvarying exhibition in your conduct, of "whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report,"—of all

that contains in it "any virtue or any praise,"—let your character present a practical refutation of all the aspersions that have been thrown upon that blessed truth, to which you now cling for the hope and happiness of eternity. Make it manifest that your faith "purifies your hearts," "works by love," and is "the victory that overcometh the world:"—that "the Grace of God has brought you salvation," not merely by delivering you from the fears of hell, but by "teaching you to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, and righteously, and godly."—Many a time have you heard the hackneyed lines of the poet—

> "For modes of faith let graceless zealots fight;
> His can't be wrong, whose life is in the right."

—Now, foolish as every maxim must be, that disjoins practice from principle, and supposes the one to be right while the other is wrong; there is yet a sense in which the poet's words are true. Men are ever putting asunder what God has joined, and forming

their estimates of *a right life* from partial and inadequate standards. But if we only understand the phrase with its proper comprehensiveness of meaning, it is certainly not far from the truth, that we may infer rectitude of faith from rectitude of life. If in a *right life* there be included, not only living "soberly and righteously," as these words are usually understood, but also "godly,"—not only "doing justly and loving mercy," but "walking humbly with our God,"—not only worldly virtue, but scriptural holiness:—if the life be *thus* right, it may be confidently concluded that the faith cannot be far wrong. But you must all be aware of the undefined vagueness in which the lines are understood by the vast majority of those to whose lips, as expressing a favourite sentiment, they are most familiar. A right life is interpreted by such persons in ten thousand shades of meaning:—and neither having, nor desiring to have, correct conceptions of its nature, looseness and generality being much more convenient, they only mean,

when they sport the quotation (for in general it is very lightly done) to express their contempt for all differences of mere opinion and belief, and, by the help of a well-sounding couplet and a plausible sentiment, to apologise for ignorance, and cover an aversion to serious inquiry.—But if *they* err in disjoining practice from faith, beware *ye* of the opposite and not less pernicious error, of disjoining faith from practice. If you do, be assured, your faith is mere profession:—you are believers only in name. For "what doth it profit, my brethren, if a man say he hath faith, and have not works? Can faith save him? If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, and one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful for the body;—what doth it profit? Even so faith, if it have not works, is dead, being alone."—As, in the case from which the Apostle draws his comparison, we prefer the evidence of deeds to that of words, and pronounce the

man a mere pretender to charity; so must we, in the case which the comparison is brought to illustrate, pronounce the fruitless professor,—the man who says he has faith, but has not works,—a mere pretender to faith. There is no charity in the one case; there is no faith in the other. Deceive not yourselves, with such a "name to live." "Be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves." Let the words of Christ himself,—words alike of warning and of encouragement, be deeply impressed upon your minds, and present always, with practical power, to your remembrance:—"Therefore, whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, who built his house upon a rock; and the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock. And every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, who built his house upon the sand;

and the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it."*

May God the Spirit so carry home his own word, as effectually to convince of sin all who have not yet believed in Christ, as he is revealed in the testimony of the gospel! May he carry it home to the awakening of the *profligate*, of the *thoughtless*, of the *proud*,—of the "*rich* man, who glories in his riches; of the *mighty* man, who glories in his might; of the *wise* man who glories in his wisdom;" of the *self-righteous* man, who glories in his virtue;—and bring them all, in their common character of sinners, to the foot of the cross, as suppliants for mercy! —The words of the text and context were uttered by the lips of the faithful and gracious Redeemer himself. They are alike characterized by the weight of authority, the fidelity of warning, and the persuasiveness of love. "Hear, and your souls shall live:"—

* Matth. vii. 24—27.

"As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up; that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life. For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved. He that believeth on him is not condemned; but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil."

THE END.

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